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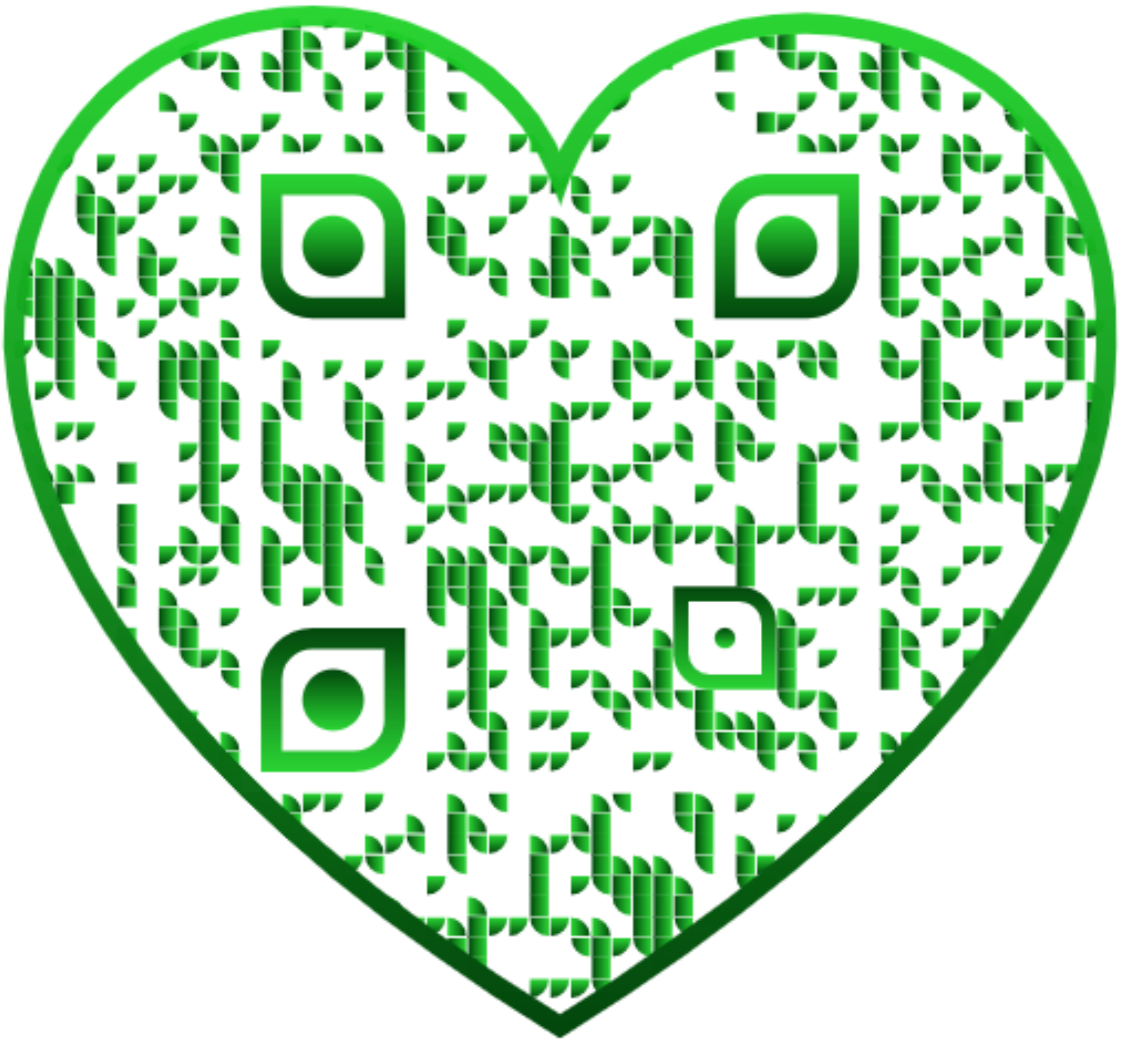

THE P
ISS

Welcome to *Premier Guitar*'s a
most hotly anticipated of the y
stompbox-related features—in
how to get the most out of you
venerable Ibanez Tube Scre
and a profile of boutique po
—as well as fantas
reviews of the 37 p
So what are you wait

PEDAL SUE

nnual Pedal Issue—one of our ear. Inside you'll find a slew of cluding an insightful lesson on ur delay pedal, a history of the eamer, a pedal-mod how-to, edal pioneer Robert Keeley tically informative edals you see here. ing for? Stomp on in!

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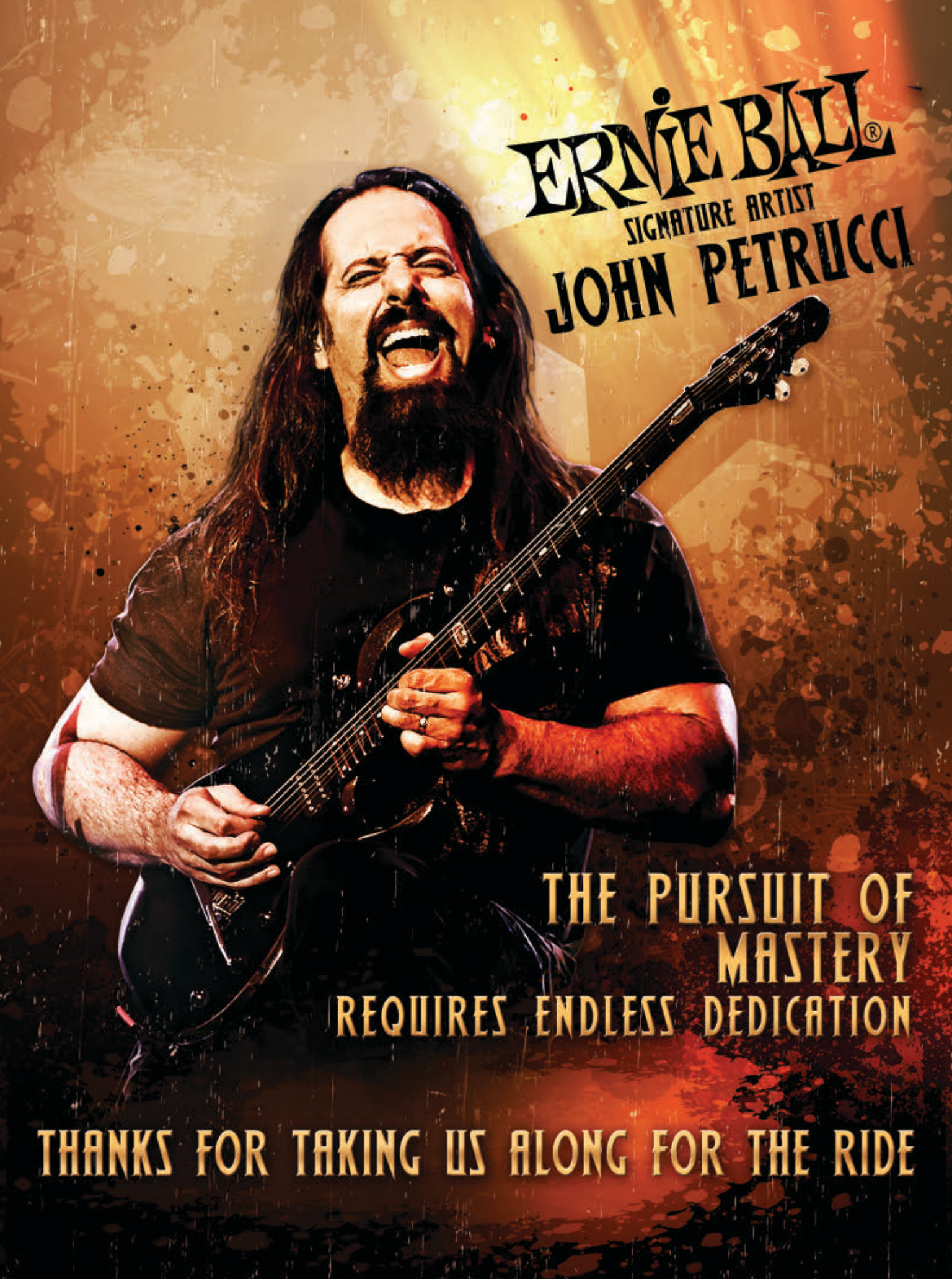
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IronHorse Head shown with DHX212 Cabinet

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To Stomp, or Not to Stomp …

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

Let me apologize right off the bat for using a headline that shamelessly bastardizes Shakespeare's famous *Hamlet* quote for the quadrillionth time in modern history. I assure you my thoughts here are nowhere near as compelling as that amazing soliloquy, but what the hell—I'll sashay forth anyway.

A little over a year ago, I had an epiphany in the middle of a jam session with my pal and drum guru, Jeremy (who's also a great guitarist). I faced the classic challenge confronting every guitarist with more than a tuner and an overdrive in their signal chain. You probably know what I'm talking about. It's the idea that if you just hit one more pedal (or some super-ingenious combination of pedals and settings never before concocted by humankind), maybe—just *maybe*—aural ecstasy will ensue.

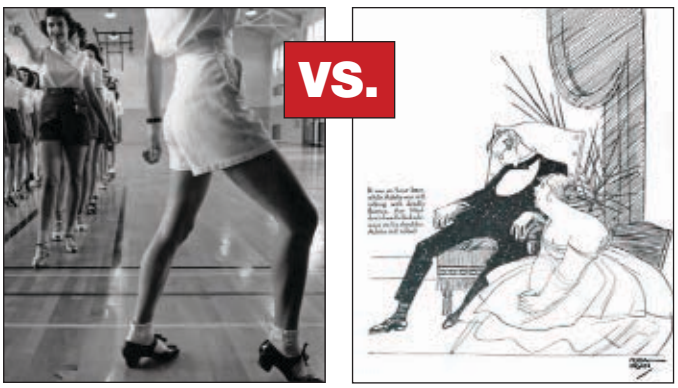
If you haven't been there yet, just wait—you will. Or maybe you're just much more focused and/or in touch with your muse than I am. Who knows. The point is, I was letting way too damn much of my creative energy, mental capacity, and groove be siphoned off by the shiny, brightly colored boxes on my pedalboard.

The thing is, it's not like I had *that* many on there. Five, maybe six. I'd already jettisoned my DigiTech Whammy a couple of years before, but I still had a distortion pedal, a fuzz, a wah, a badass new reverb pedal, and my trusty tremolo pedal—one of the earliest, most iconic in the boutique world.

Yes, that's all it took to befuddle this ol' twangin' bastard and convince me to simplify. It's pathetic, I know. But, hell, everyone knows Jeff Beck is just about the most expressive guitarist on the planet—and he hardly ever steps on a stomp. Same goes for Brian Setzer, one of my other all-time favorites. So, I ripped the wah off my 'board, sold the fuzz *and* the distortion, and decided I was going to get all I could out of a cranked tube amp and reverb and tremolo pedals.

I don't have any scientific before-and-after recordings that I can reference to make an open-and-shut case for the effectiveness of this exercise in simplicity, but I can say with absolute sincerity that I'm really, *really* glad I did it. I've never been one to sit down and figure out what my favorite guitarists and bands are playing, so it's not like I've spent the last year trying to conjure the magic that Beck gets with his incredible use of a Strat's tremolo—I'm not trying to be a virtuoso, anyway. But I did approach the instrument with the idea that I'd figure out how to alter my attack and use a different part of my thumb or fingers to get some portion of the expressiveness that Beck taps into with such aplomb. I improved my Travis-picking technique. I got so adept at tucking my pick up between my index-finger knuckles while I fingerpicked that I didn't even realize when I was doing it. I got pretty good at snapping the strings in a way that's like a cross between a Tele-wielding hillbilly and a funk bassist. And recently I hit on the gritty, darker articulation you get when you flip around one of those picks with the raised gripping surface and use the broad side rather than the pointed end.

And yet … recently I've been hankering for one of those new Whammys. A few years ago I wrote a tune that begins with an echo-drenched power chord having its harmonized thirds slowly bending into fourths, and then an inverted chord doing the same. The effect was simple, otherworldly, and gorgeous—and there are precious few pedals out there that can do something like that. Plus, the new Whammys are true-bypass, and therefore don't suck out high end like they used to.



The Goal: Don't be so obsessed with stomping on your neat-o pedals that tap-dance calisthenics are in order—and don't be such a purist that your monotonous 6-string orations put your audience to sleep.

Besides, as the editor of a magazine and website that sees a steady stream of incredible gear go in and out of its doors, it's pretty hard to not lust. Especially given how much I love effects masters like Vernon Reid, Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien, David Torn, Tom Morello, and J. Mascis.

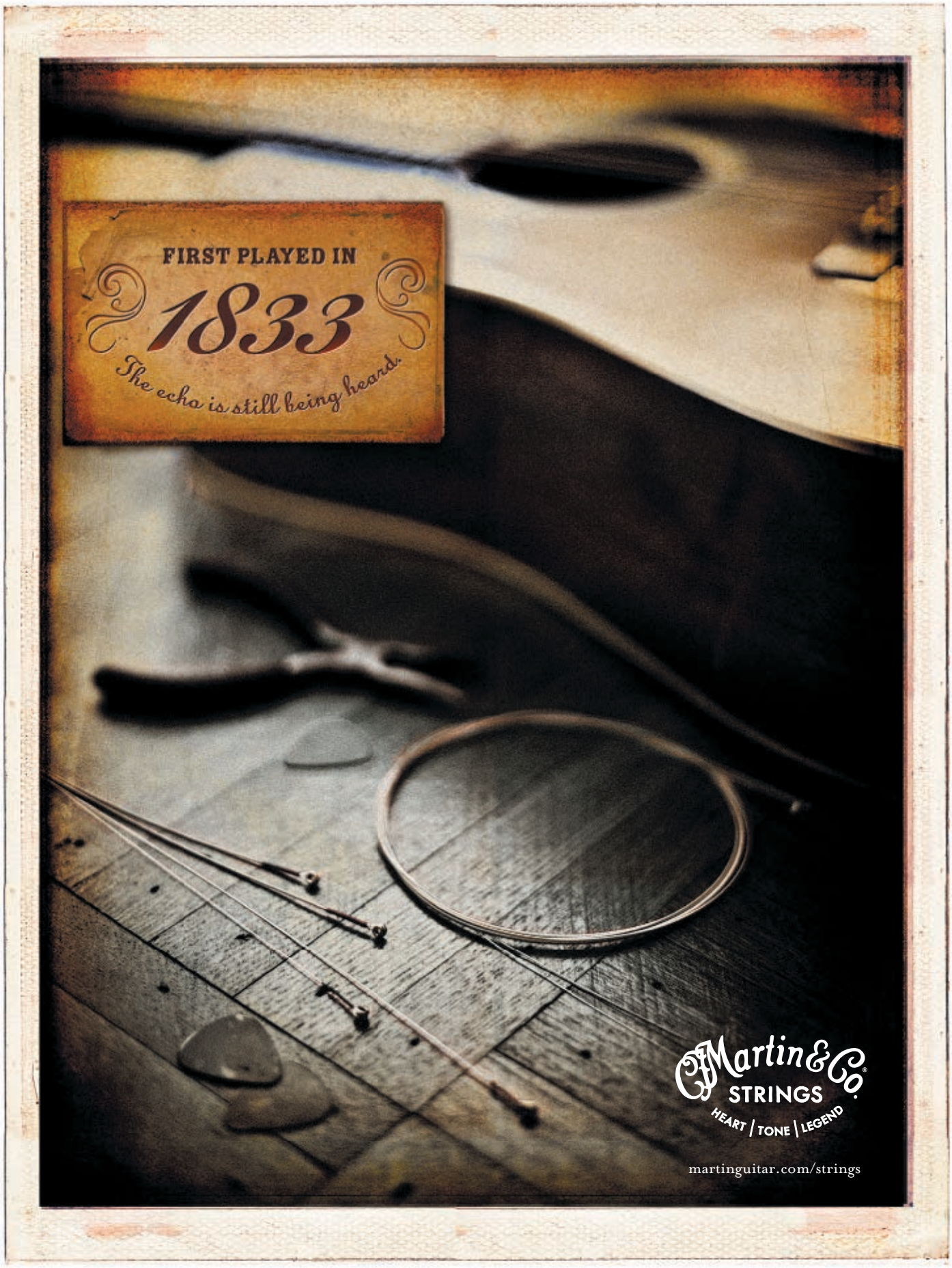
I guess what I'm saying is the question of stomping or not stomping is just like anything else—if you're such a hard-ass purist that you think there's only one good way to do things, you're just going to miss out on a lot of cool stuff and come across as a jackass in the process.

Don't get me wrong. I'll always treasure and take advantage of everything I learned over the last year of relative effect celibacy, but my tastes are too diverse to warrant walking any sort of puritanical path.

The other night I got out my wah, put it back on my pedalboard, played it, and … promptly ripped it off again. I'm just not a wah guy, I guess. But the boost pedal and compressor I recently added have already yielded big dividends. Yeah, I know they're pretty much the tamest effects on the planet, but their powers are exponential when combined with a carefully considered approach.

And don't you worry, I'm carefully plotting my next pedal moves. Because I've realized the answer to the question, "To stomp, or not to stomp?" How much one stomps is going to vary from player to player, but as long as you use them as an inspiration rather than a distraction and a crutch, you're kind of crazy not to take advantage of them—especially considering how many ingenious and incredible-sounding designs are coming out these days.

Shawn Hammond
shawn@premierguitar.com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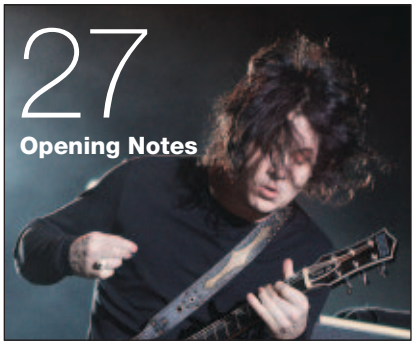

Photo by Ken Settle

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Your guide to the stories, reviews, galleries, and videos appearing on premierguitar.com/nov2011 this month.

<<<

Even More Pedal Reviews!

Our epic pedal roundup continues online with 13 more reviews, plus audio examples of every pedal we reviewed. Head to premierguitar.com for reviews of these pedals:

- Build Your Own Clone Scrambler
- Catalinbread CB30
- Creepy Fingers Fuzzbud
- Daring Audio Edge Activator
- DigiTech Whammy DT
- Earthquaker Devices Dispatch Master
- Levana Bunker Booster
- Line 6 M5
- MXR Analog Chorus
- Quinn Dirt & Ernie
- Rockbox Electronics Baby Blues
- T-Rex Gull Wah
- Whirlwind Perfect 10 EQ

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Bonus Feature Photos

Want to see more photos from this issue's artist and gear features? Look for the Facebook logo above in select articles in this issue and then click on the Photos tab on our Facebook page to access additional pictures for that piece. This month you can see more shots of Mastodon and Samantha Fish.

FACEBOOK PHOTO OF THE MONTH

This month's Facebook fan photo of the month comes from *PG* reader and pedal enthusiast who refers to himself as Gunner Recall. Gunner, who submitted these envy-inducing "before" and "after" photos of organizing his epic pedal collection, you win—we bow down to your array of effects. But we can't help but wonder the fate of the stuffed panda.

Submit your photo by posting it to our wall at Facebook.com/premierguitar

In Depth With Fender Eric Clapton Signature Amps

We give you an exclusive look inside Fender's amp factory in Corona, California with our video tour following each step of building the company's new, handwired, Eric Clapton signature amps. Plus, watch comprehensive demos of the EC Vibro-Champ, EC Tremolux, and EC Twinolux.

Search for: How to Build a Fender Handwired Amp and Fender EC Demos

Pro Pedalboards, Volume II

You made last year's Pro Pedalboards photo gallery the most popular online story of all time! We're bringing it back better than ever this year with new photos of recent pedalboards from more than 30 guitarists in all genres.

Search for: GALLERY: Pro Pedalboards, Vol. II

Firebird X Reviewed

It's controversial, it's packed with electronics, and—according to Gibson—it's revolutionary. We got our hands on Gibson's latest creation to see what it's all about, how it sounds, and who would put it to best use.

Search for: Gibson Firebird X Electric Guitar Review

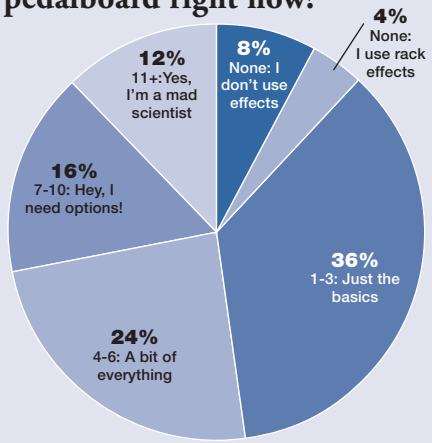
Micro Bass Head Roundup

The hottest trend in bass amplification is ultra-portable heads that pack tons of power into a lightweight package. We got our hands on seven of the newest and most intriguing offerings and sort through the features to help you decide which one fits your needs. In the roundup: Gallien Krueger MB200, Overton Flyweight 200, Carvin BX250 Micro Bass, Eden WTX-264, Euphonic Audio Micro, Markbass F1, and Genz-Benz Shuttle 9.0.

Search for: 7 Micro Bass Amp Heads for Any Budget

POLL OF THE MONTH

How many pedals are on your pedalboard right now?



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EarthQuaker Devices Chrysalis Overdrive
November 2 – 8

Planet Waves Tru-Strobe Pedal Tuner
November 9 – 15

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106816891	'80 GIBSON ES335 S DLX	Carle Place, NY	$699.99
106826576	'74 FENDER DELUXE REVERB	Cherry Hill, NJ	$1,199.99
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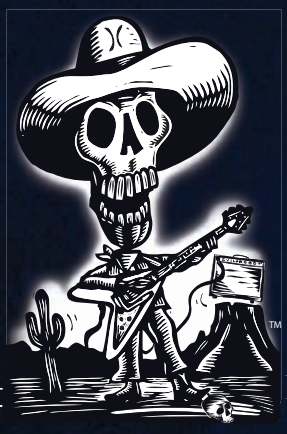

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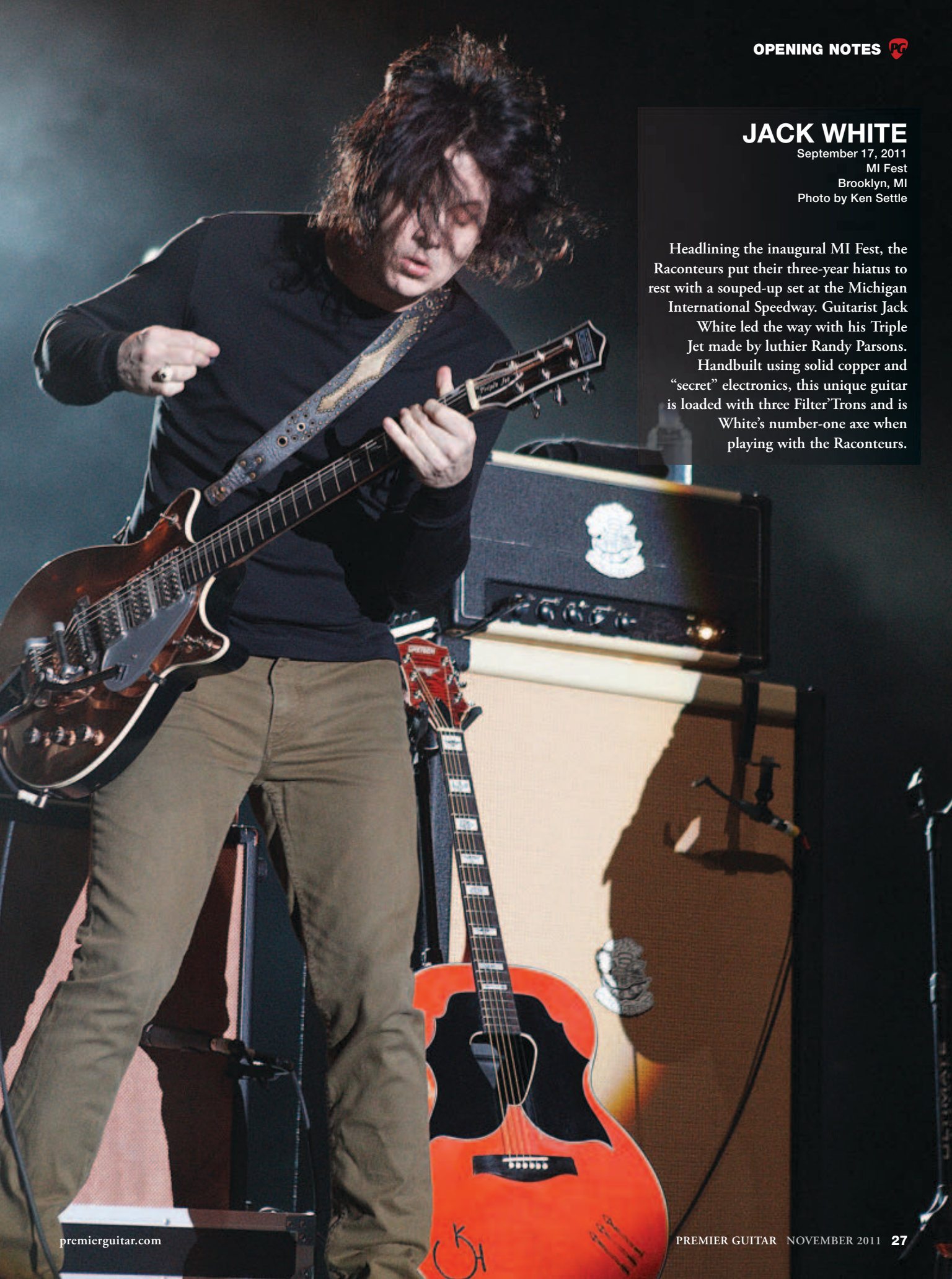

JACK WHITE

September 17, 2011
MI Fest
Brooklyn, MI
Photo by Ken Settle

Headlining the inaugural MI Fest, the Raconteurs put their three-year hiatus to rest with a souped-up set at the Michigan International Speedway. Guitarist Jack White led the way with his Triple Jet made by luthier Randy Parsons. Handbuilt using solid copper and "secret" electronics, this unique guitar is loaded with three Filter'Trons and is White's number-one axe when playing with the Raconteurs.

FLEA

August 24, 2011
Club Nokia
Los Angeles, CA
Photo by Lindsey Best

At a recent L.A. show benefiting the Silverlake Conservatory of Music, a non-profit musical education program founded by Flea of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the funky bass god thumps his custom Modulus bass. Given to him in 2008, the one-of-a-kind 4-string was handpainted by an Australian artist of Aboriginal descent.

VINNIE MOORE

September 17, 2011
Avalon
Santa Clara, CA
Photo by Robert Stahl

Legendary shredder Vinnie Moore bends his G into submission during a solo with UFO at a gig in Orange County. His Dean Vinman2000 signature guitar features a quilted-maple top, maple neck and fretboard, a Floyd Rose trem, two DiMarzio single-coils, and a USA DMT Vinnie Moore signature humbucker.

MIKE NESS

September 18, 2011
ACL Festival
Austin, TX
Photo by Arnold Wells

Three decades strong and still capable of bringing down the house, Social Distortion put their driving cowpunk on display for the 10th anniversary of the Austin City Limits Music Festival on the event's last evening. Frontman Mike Ness got things started with his go-to axe, a '76 goldtop Les Paul Deluxe with custom Seymour Duncan P-90s.

GARY CLARK JR.

September 16, 2011
ACL Festival
Austin, TX
Photo by Arnold Wells

Hometown hero Gary Clark Jr. served up his unique style of blues to the more than 70,000 attendees at the Austin City Limits Festival. Clark has removed the pickguard and added a Bigsby to his Epiphone Elitist 1965 Casino, which has a 5-ply maple body and stock US-made P-90s.

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GUITAR CENTER EXPANDS BOUTIQUE PEDAL DISTRIBUTION

BY REBECCA DIRKS

LOS ANGELES, CA – Guitar Center has expanded their pedal offerings to include more boutique brands in select stores across the United States. Boutique pedal showcases will be installed in Guitar Center's Platinum stores to start, and some pedals are offered for sale on GuitarCenter.com now.

New pedal offerings include selections from Fulltone, Lovepedal, T-Rex, Z.Vex, Cusack, Empress, Keeley, Mad Professor, Malekko, Death By Audio, Diamond, Eventide, Pigtronix, Xotic, Black Cat, DLS, Emma, Fuchs, GNI, HAO, Harden Engineering, Option 5, Rivera, Toadworks, Tortuga, and Sweet Sound. **gcplatinum.com**

Dept. of Justice Clarifies Lacey Act, Says Guitar Owners are Safe

BY REBECCA DIRKS

WASHINGTON, DC – Guitarists concerned about facing criminal charges for unknowingly owning guitars made with illegal wood can rest easy, according to a September 19, 2011 letter of clarification from the United States Justice Department. The letter states that, "People who *unknowingly* possess a musical instrument or other object containing wood that was illegally taken, possessed, transported or sold in violation of the law and who, in the exercise of due care, would not have known that it was illegal, do not have criminal exposure." The letter was the first official response to inquiries regarding the August 24 raids at Gibson Guitar facilities, and subsequent concerns expressed by the musical instrument community and Congress.

The government raids worried many American guitar owners, builders, and dealers. The law at work in the raids, the Lacey Act, regulates trade of endangered species. Many in the guitar industry worry that the act's 2008 amendment that covers plants—including wood used to build guitars—is vague enough to implicate anyone possessing a guitar with questionable wood. "I think it's causing panic in this industry," George Gruhn told *The Wall Street Journal* in a September 2 article. Later that week, NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) sent a letter to President Obama and Congress expressing "deep frustration over a regulation that is impacting music products manufacturers as well as retailers and owners of musical instruments in the U.S."

Gibson's case has quickly become politicized—the raid of an American business coincided with President Obama's speech on American job creation. Members of Congress subsequently demanded answers. The House Energy and Commerce Committee sent a letter to the Department of Justice on September 8, saying, "The deputy director general of foreign trade for India has stated that India would allow the exports. Henry Juszkiewicz, CEO of Gibson, also stated in an interview that the company has been importing this wood for 17 years without issue, as have several competitor companies which have yet to be raided by federal agents."

The Department of Justice responded with the September 19 letter referenced above. The letter also states, "By prohibiting trafficking in wood illegally harvested overseas, the Lacey Act prohibits companies from undercutting law-abiding US wood products companies, including numerous small businesses, by trading in artificially inexpensive raw materials that have been illegally harvested from foreign forests." The letter declined to address the specific reasons behind the Gibson raids, drawing additional criticism from Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee.

On September 28, the *Nashville Business Journal* reported on the specifics of the Gibson violations. The *Journal* reports that a shipment of wood that was classified as finished instrument parts—legal for export under Indian laws—was actually unfinished ebony, according to Fish and Wildlife Service agent Kevin Seiler. Seiler said in a sworn affidavit, "It is clear that Gibson understands the purpose of the Lacey Act, and understands that … fingerboard blanks are not finished fingerboards and thus Gibson is aware that its order for fingerboard blanks was an order for contraband ebony wood or ebony wood which is illegal to possess." At press time, Federal authorities were demanding that Gibson hand over additional wood that was not seized during the raids. Gibson could not be reached for comment.

Chris Broderick and Alex Skolnick Announce Guitar Retreat

BY JASON SHADRICK

BIG INDIAN, NY – Megadeth guitarist Chris Broderick and Testament guitarist Alex Skolnick have teamed up to present a winter guitar retreat taking place at Full Moon

Resort in Big Indian, New York, from December 26 to December 30. This retreat is the first winter installment of the Music Masters Camp series. Previous camps have featured Dweezil Zappa, Todd Rundgren, Adrian Belew, and Tony Levin.

During the all-inclusive stay, both Broderick and Skolnick will hold a variety of workshops and seminars covering topics such as two-handed tapping, improvisation, developing leads, jazz theory, guitar history, understanding rhythm, and life as a professional musician. Bassist Nathan Peck and drummer Matt "Zebar" Zebroski—both members of Skolnick's trio—will serve as the rhythm section for the retreat. Guitarists of all talent levels are invited to attend the retreat, which will include

Megadeth's Chris Broderick and Testament's Alex Skolnick team up to drop some knowledge on aspiring metal guitarists at a December 26–30 retreat. Photo by Stephanie Cabral

master classes with Broderick and Skolnick, jam sessions, open mic nights, and optional private lessons.

"I'm really looking forward to partnering with my friend Chris Broderick for our Winter Guitar Retreat," Skolnick said in a statement. "Each of us has a unique, individual approach to guitar, and it's always fun to share one's experiences with deserving students. Therefore, we've decided to join forces and create the ultimate post-Christmas, pre-New Year's getaway for amateur and pro guitarists alike."

Fans can choose from a variety of accommodation packages that range between $1950 and $2350 per person. A 10-percent discount is available for fans that pay in full before October 31st.

sbwinterguitarretreat.com

The editors of *Premier Guitar* offer up some unsolicited opinions about guitars and 6-string life.

ON

Joe Gore Launches DIY Club – The Tonefiend DIY Club lives on the Seymour Duncan website and is said to be "suitable for absolute beginners."

OFF

Man Steals Guitar from Corpse – The funeral home employee said he had "a respect for fine musical instruments," which apparently trumped his respect for the dead man's wish to be buried with his beloved Tele.

Manny's Music Signed Photos Auctioned – Another sad entry in the history of New York's quickly declining Music Row.

STBY

REM Officially Calls It Quits – Challenging most of our assumptions that they had called it quits five years ago.

Rock Hall Stiffs Kiss, Rush … Again – But Guns N' Roses, Heart, Joan Jett, the Faces, Donovan, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Freddie King get noms.

Your Feedback

BRING THE NOISE!

Thanks for the article on prepared guitar in your recent issue ["Avant Guitar 101: Alternate Attacks" October 2011]. Noise is the reason I started playing with a guitar several years ago, and it is exciting to see you covering nontraditional ground when it comes to guitar use. Though I have morphed into a more traditional player, I still get antsy every once in a while and play with sound while my 2 1/2-year-old dials in my pedals.
—Shannon Sopha
via Facebook

You're welcome, Shannon! So glad to hear you're still indulging your primal side and bringing your toddler up right. Best of luck to you!

Productivity-Torpedoing Technology

Well, nothing is getting done today since I downloaded your iPad app. Thanks a lot.
—Chas Burks
via Facebook

Er … you're welcome? Ha! But seriously, keep your eyes out for some upcoming reviews on cool new iPad and iPhone recording/rehearsing interfaces, Chas. In the meantime, enjoy!

Kick-Ass "Cake"

I just got your August issue free at the Southeastern Guitar and Amp Show. Totally kick-ass mag! The icing on the cake was lessons from Paul Gilbert and Pat Martino. \m/\m/
—Chuck Sicola
via Facebook

Thanks, Chuck! Yet another cool amp show, huh? Hmmm … we'll have to check into that. As for Paul and Pat, we couldn't agree more!

Let the Good Times Roll

I'm a French fan of your magazine, and as soon as a new issue is available for download you can bet I will have read the entire thing three days later. Yesterday started off pretty bad: My job was bringing me down (I'm a chief editor for an acoustic guitar magazine, so you know what it's like), it had been three weeks since I caught a bad cold, my band didn't make it on a proper label yet, and when I came home I was beyond exhaustion. I had an argument with my girlfriend, and I ended up reading *PG* alone in our bedroom. Since I had just started [the issue], I read your column on having fun in life ["Having Fun Yet? (Seriously—*Are* you?)," Tuning Up October 2011], and that really struck a chord. That gave me the warning I needed and, therefore, I got up feeling much better, went to my girlfriend, and we had a fantastic evening playing guitar together. Thanks for that, and keep up the good work !
—Julien Bitoun
via email

I just read your piece "Having Fun Yet? (Seriously—*Are* you?)" and I just had to drop you a line to tell you how great I thought it was. I could tell how much you felt what you wrote and I really dug your point of view. You rock!
—Sasha A. Kostadinov
via email

What a great article. My drummer and I have done this [thrown in silly riffs] for over 30 years. He takes things too seriously to the point he›s not having fun. Thanks again.
—Bill Ducas
Fresno, California

Hallo Shawn.
My name is Stefano Benedetti. I am from Italy, and I am a subscriber to *Premier Guitar*'s free digital edition. I want to tell you that you made my day. I think that your editorial on having fun is the best and most useful article I've read in years, and not only in music magazines. You must be a very good human being (or at least one who›s trying to be). Keep up the very good work, and greetings from pizzaland.
—Stefano Benedetti
via email

@premierguitar Shawn Hammond's [Tuning Up] in the October issue came at the perfect time. Driving 6 hrs to a big gig. I resolve to have fun!
—@BeachBand
via Twitter

Well written and timely. I needed that. Everyone should be required to read it—although I would not have expected to find it in *PG*. I might add, it›s also Biblical. But then, I really *would* like to have a Taylor T5 12-string in walnut. Thanks for the article. *PG* is simply the best guitar magazine out there.
—Dave Cooley
via email

Editor in Chief Shawn Hammond replies: "Wow. We got a lot *of responses to my half-baked musings in the 'Having Fun Yet?' piece. It's really neat to hear how this resonated with you guys. Thank you so much for your kind words!"*

Corrections

In our October 2011 feature on B.C. Rich, we mistakenly said that sound engineer Bob "Nite Bob" Czaykowski purchased a koa-bodied Mockingbird for Aerosmith's Joe Perry in 1976. According to Czaykowski, Perry's first B.C. Rich actually had a maple body (the receipt for the guitar, as well as a flight case, appears above). The koa Mockingbird came a few months later, when Perry requested one with a Bigsby vibrato.

In that same issue, we botched the final figure in Dirk Wacker's Mod Garage column ["Exploring Fender's 5-Way Super Switch," October 2011]. To see the figures as they should be, view the updated version of the article on premierguitar.com.

Keep those comments coming!
Please send your suggestions, gripes, comments, and good words directly to **info@premierguitar.com**.

TEAR INTO YOUR POTENTIAL. JIMDUNLOP.COM

Every once in a while a special pedal comes along and earns a permanent place in our signal chain. This month—as we celebrate all things stompbox—the *PG* editors, along with British blues phenom Davy Knowles, name their favorite pedal. Send your essential picks to info@premierguitar.com.

Joe Coffey

Editorial Director

What am I listening to?

The Chris Duarte Group's *Blues in the Afterburner*. Produced by Mike Varney, this record is bold. I'm digging the chances Duarte takes and, of course, his usual solid Texas blues.

What pedal can I not live without?

Definitely my Radial Tonebone PZ-Pre, which is the acoustic player's jack of all trades for the stage and studio. It's like a DI, AB/Y, EQ, piezo boost, and more built into one, with multiple outs (pre- and post-EQ).

Andy Ellis

Senior Editor

What am I listening to?

Duane Eddy *Road Trip*. Beautifully recorded in Sheffield, England, this new release opens with growling bass VI and offers all the throbbing tremolo, Bigsby vibrato, and cavernous reverb that made Eddy a star in 1958.

What pedal can I not live without?

Though I own some nice pedals—including an original TS9 Tube Screamer and a 1970 Vox wah, both of which I bought new—they all sit unused on the shelf. I roll with a purple 10' Bullet coil cord plugged straight into my amp.

Shawn Hammond

Editor in Chief

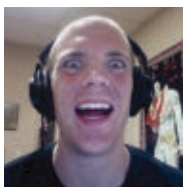
What am I listening to?

Ahhh—the wonder of Spotify! Totally digging older National stuff, especially *Sad Songs for Dirty Lovers*. "Slipping Husband" and "Available" are gorgeous and gut-wrenchingly intense

What pedal can I not live without?

The Strymon Blue Sky Reverberator. You'd never know its spring-reverb isn't the real thing, it's *incredibly* tweakable, and yet it retains a simple-stompbox ethos. I also love being able to switch between two presets.

Chris Kies



Associate Editor

What am I listening to?

Two of the most important voices in music are showcased in these collections: Elvis' *Young Man with the Big Beat* box set and Johnny Cash's *Bootleg Volume 3: Live Around the World*, which show both stars at pivotal points of their careers and on point as performers.

What pedal can I not live without?

The pedal that makes me sound better every time—Electro-Harmonix's Nano Memory Toy Analog Delay.

Rich Osweiler

Associate Editor

What am I listening to?

St. Vincent *Strange Mercy*. Annie Clark's latest effort, like much of her other material, could seem complicated and chaotic to some at first listen. But at the core are ethereal, well-thought-out compositions that highlight her stunning voice and the alter-ego rumble of her guitar work.

What pedal can I not live without?

Gotta go with my Boss TU-2 tuner. There's just no tone without tune!

Charles Saufley

Gear Editor

What am I listening to?

Kouroush Yaghmaei, *Back From The Brink, Pre-Revolution Psychedelic Rock from Iran: 1973-1979*. Kouroush learned guitar by copying Ventures records, then fused it with Persian folk phrasings, the Stones, and Curtis Mayfield-style wah into a lyrical, beguiling, and beautiful body of work.

What pedal can I not live without?

My Echoplex has been broken for about five years now, so I guess I'll live. Anyone out there have a spare erase head?

Davy Knowles

Guest Picker

What am I listening to?

As I write this, Joni Mitchell. Although I love the blues and rock classics, I have always loved songwriters, especially Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, CSN&Y, and the whole Laurel Canyon scene. Some beautiful songs and stories came out of that place.

What pedal can I not live without?

I just got a BK Butler Tube Driver, and I can't stop playing it. It's a really musical-sounding overdrive pedal.

Jason Shadrick

Associate Editor

What am I listening to?

Wynton Marsalis and Eric Clapton, *Play the Blues*. Finally, a band that can keep Clapton on his toes while still paying tribute to the history of the genre. Clapton returns to his ES-335 roots with a meaty tone that fits in perfectly.

What pedal can I not live without?

My pedalboard is in a constant state of flux, but my Visual Sound Route 66 Overdrive/Compressor and Boss DD-2 Digital Delay are mainstays.

Peter Thorn

Online Columnist: The Working Guitarist

What am I listening to?

I love Cage The Elephant—best new band I've heard in a long time. These guys capture the spirit of what rock 'n' roll is about, and do it in a fresh way.

What pedal can I not live without?

My new Carl Martin compressor! I love what it does for my clean tones—it just pumps things up beautifully, without weird artifacts. Since getting it, I am using compression much more than I did in the past.

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Destroy All Guitars
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destroyallguitars.com

The Music Zoo
Little Neck, NY
themusiczoo.com

Humbucker Music
Fort Oglethorpe,GA
humbuckermusic.com

Diffusion Audio/Boutique Tone
Montreal, QC, Canada
diffusion-audio.com, boutiquetone.com

Deluxe Guitar Exchange
Greenville, SC
deluxeguitarexchange.com

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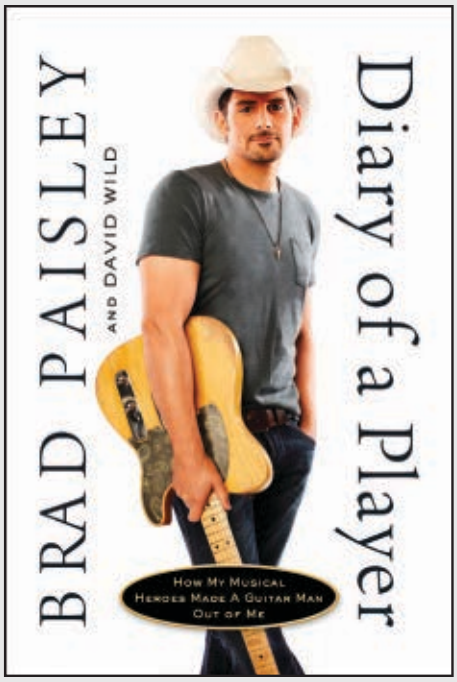
BOOK

Diary of a Player

Brad Paisley and David Wild
Howard Books



Brad Paisley knows a thing or two about writing hooks for general music fans while still throwing in enough guitar pyrotechnics to keep his guitar-playing audience happy, if not slightly stunned. He applies that same formula to *Diary of a Player*, a book he's described as a "love letter to the guitar."

Paisley is sometimes described as the wunderkind who crashed into country music with more than enough talent to spare, but that's not the way he sees it. Sure, the passion was there, but so was the practice. Using the superhero universe as a metaphor, Paisley describes himself as Batman—a character with no particular birthright for the cause, who is also human, flawed, and actually lacks the kind of power that guarantees other superheroes of keeping their jobs.

Paisley's history as a player would make a good Disney movie. He started with a Silvertone electric. He admired his grandfather, who was a pretty good picker, but regrets showing off in what he now realizes was the moment they both knew he was a better player. He felt the need to stop playing for an entire summer. He went from playing a church picnic to playing any gig he could find, which included nursing homes and fire-station Christmas parties. He worked hard to keep audiences interested, even resorting to playing the theme from *Sesame Street* or "The Hokey Pokey" if the situation called for it. He struggled with the decision of whether or not to perform his own material once he started playing bigger stages. He opened for other acts for years and once was even doused with beer while standing too close to a frustrated Vern Gosdin who was having issues with his monitors. Paisley even auditioned for a gig at Opryland and had a deer-in-the-headlights moment when they said, "Show us you can dance." He did the moonwalk.

Paisley got G.A.S. at an early age, like the rest of us, so it's interesting to read his recollection of gear acquisitions. After the Silvertone, he got a Gremlin acoustic before moving up to a Hondo Strat copy and then a Tokai Strat copy. He refers to his first vintage AC30 purchase, a direct order from a music store in England, as "The Great Vox Amp Crisis of 1987." He had to make several trips to the hardware store to get it configured for US power and to replace blown fuses. Regardless, Paisley says that was the moment "I had discovered my sound. My tone."

Paisley's *Diary of a Player* lacks the addiction battles and contract scam stories that usually characterize books penned by famous guitarists. Paisley hasn't misstepped and has no axes to grind, which leaves more room for tales about playing with John Jorgenson, hanging out with Little Jimmy Dickens, and sneaking into the recording studio at Belmont and literally playing all night.

Paisley never dwells on amp settings or Blues Driver mods, but there's certainly enough guitar-specific insight to set this book apart from your typical rock star-penned musings. The 39-year-old country star has accomplished a lot in a short time, but he's most proud of being a *player*, which is what this book explains. —Joe Coffey

ALBUM

Sleeper Agent

Celebrasion
Mom+Pop Records

Thinking it sounded like a great name for a rowdy rock band, Sleeper Agent got the idea for their moniker from an episode of *Battlestar Galactica*. And rowdy rock is a perfect descriptor for the deliciously raunchy tunes this Bowling Green, Kentucky, band of six is churning out. The band's debut full-length release, *Celebrasion*, celebrates hook-heavy, riff-laden, garage rock and had already enjoyed a wealth of critical acclaim prior to hitting the shelves a few weeks ago.

The band comprises Alex Kandel (vocals), Tony Smith (vocals/guitar), Josh Martin (guitar), Lee Williams (bass), Justin Wilson (drums), and Scott Gardner (keyboards). Smith and Kandel share vocal duties equally throughout the album with seamless, back-and-forth exchanges on each tune. "Get It Daddy"—the fist-bumping anthem that's the first single on the record—is a ferocious and perfect example of Sleeper Agent's dual-vocal-style over fuzz-filled riffage. With it's energy, pace, and interesting time change at the bridge, "Get It Daddy" is a nice start to this party.

The energy of *Celebrasion* remains fairly constant throughout the 12 fun and driven tunes, many of which bring to mind Urge Overkill or early Strokes. A nice break from the action occurs right in the middle of the record with "That's My Baby"—a dark, country-esque ballad with plenty of twang and chorus from the guitar work of Smith and Martin. The song also showcases the 18-year-old Kandel, who delivers a delicate crooning beyond her years.

Sleeper Agent has awoken by delivering a high-octane debut record with *Celebrasion*. If you're into fast, ferocious, and happy garage-pop, you can't go wrong by giving this some listening time. —Rich Osweiler

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Get It Daddy"

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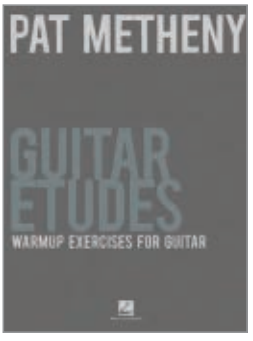
BOOK

Guitar Etudes: Warmup Exercises for Guitar

Pat Metheny
Hal Leonard

The process for warming up before a gig or practice session is different for everyone. Depending on your strengths and weaknesses, it might even change everyday. Jazz guitarist Pat Metheny recently released a book of guitar etudes that outlines what his typical pre-gig routine entails. During a summer tour of Italy in 2010, Metheny set up a small recorder, documented his process, and then transcribed 14 improvised pieces to create this book.

Each etude is presented in both tab and standard notation without any commentary or direction from the author. Since these are improvised, they are looser in format than a typical etude book. Each exercise flows freely between various keys and scales, and in some cases time signatures. Metheny's goal here was to demonstrate how to move freely around the instrument without becoming locked into a specific idea.

When you play through these etudes, you really get a sense of how Metheny views the fretboard and connects ideas. In "Exercise 10 (Pescara)," you can see how a master improviser can take a simple G major triad and turn it into a melodic string-skipping exercise that moves through several different keys and patterns. The majority of the exercises focus on moving around the fretboard and connecting ideas with a series of eighth-notes. A few are presented with some direction when it comes to the picking hand, but most are left without any indication of tempo or feel. This addition could add to the effectiveness of the etudes because everyone thinks, articulates, and plays differently at various tempos. Nearly any guitarist will be able to cherry-pick a few ideas from *Guitar Etudes*, but for Metheny fans this will be the next best thing to sitting in his practice room before a gig. —Jason Shadrick

ALBUM

Kenny Vaughan

V
Sugar Hill

The sound of Bakersfield honky tonk—with its punchy Telecaster twang, strong backbeat, and stripped-down instrumentation—permeates *V*, Kenny Vaughan's debut solo album. One of Nashville's most celebrated session guitarists, Vaughan has added his snappy lines to records by Lucinda Williams, Rodney Crowell, Tim O'Brien, Marshall Chapman, the Sweethearts of the Rodeo, and dozens of other country and Americana artists. Fans of Vaughan's vibey picking have been waiting for years for him to step out on his own.

For the last decade, Vaughan has played with Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives, and the road-hardened band backs Vaughan on all but one of the album's tracks. It's a treat to hear Vaughan and Stuart trade snarling Tele licks, which Vaughan says they played through silverface Princetons. If you can imagine Don Rich and Clarence White dueling in the studio, you have a pretty good idea of what's in store on *V*. In fact, Stuart owns White's original B-bender Tele and plays the bejesus out of it on "Country Music Got a Hold on Me" and "Stay Outta My Dreams," two songs that pay homage to Buck Owens and the Buckaroos.

But *V* isn't all Bakersfield: In two instrumentals, "Mysterium" and "Minuit Sur La Plage," Vaughan salutes Duane Eddy and Hank Marvin, and he even dips into B.B. King's bag of tricks in "Okolona Tennessee." Guitar-centric solo albums can sound so dang serious, but happily this is not the case with *V*, which delivers superb picking in the context of fun songs, toe-tapping grooves, and unapologetically retro tones. If whining Teles and the occasional *thwack* of flatwounds run through slapback echo rock your world, you're in for a treat. —Andy Ellis

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Country Music Got a Hold on Me"

DVD

Iggy and the Stooges

Raw Power Live
MVD Visual

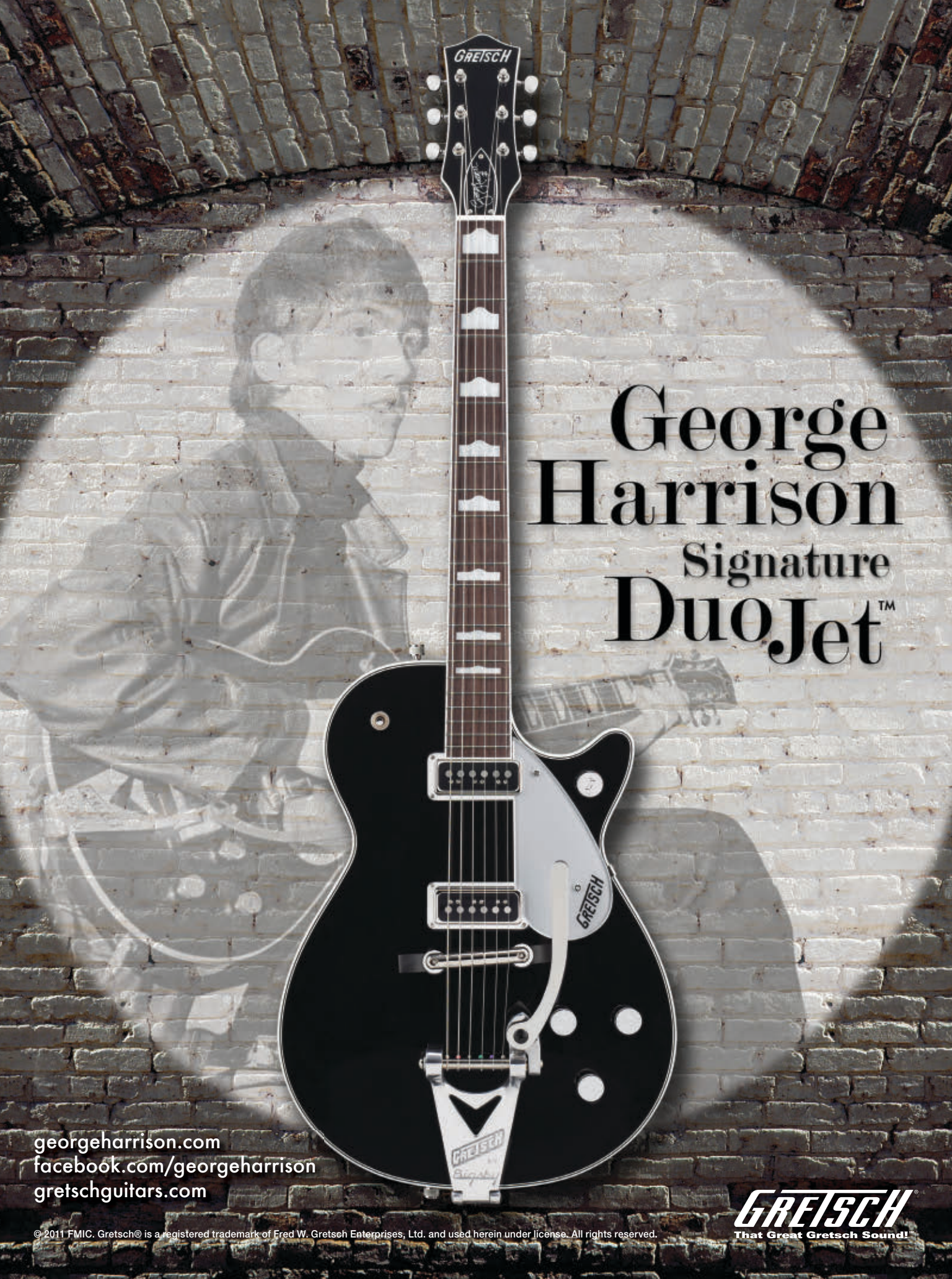
Just about every '60s legend that hit the road over the last few decades, from the Stones to the Who, could have taken a lesson from the Stooges. When the original lineup that made *The Stooges* and *Funhouse* was resurrected (with Minutemen bassist Mike Watt in the place of the deceased Dave Alexander) in 2003, they were nearly as savage as they'd ever been. With no horn sections, no backup singers, and no auxiliary keyboard army to dilute the energy, at their rippingest the Stooges are contenders for the best rock 'n' roll band to ever take the stage.

By 2010, original guitarist Ron Asheton, the forever-reigning king of psych-punk guitar, had passed away. But James Williamson, who took over the guitar throne for Asheton for the band's most famous album, 1972's *Raw Power*, was back in the fold. And in September 2010, the band performed the record in its entirety at the All Tomorrow's Parties festival in Monticello, New York.

That performance is captured on *Iggy and the Stooges, Raw Power Live*. And while the DVD doesn't quite capture the crazed electricity in the building that night, it's a study in how vital a band can remain when they shed the glitz and strip things to their essence. The centerpiece is, needless to say, the impossibly ageless Iggy, who despite what looks like a nasty limp at times, throws himself at the crowd and at and off of monitor towers like a berserker under a voodoo spell. Mike Watt and original Stooge drummer Scott Asheton add up to an amphetamine steamroller on most tunes, and a scary low-and-slow-riding Cadillac junker in others, including the smoldering set highlight "I Need Somebody."

The DVD includes fan interviews that reveal a thoughtfully reflective Iggy, Scott, and Asheton talking about making *Raw Power*, and the aspirations of assimilating free jazz, electric blues, and primitive instrumentation that brought the band together before they evolved into one of the most brutally rockin' combos of all time. —Charles Saufley

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Your Pretty Face is Going to Hell"



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THE BEAUTY OF DI BY PAUL "TFO" ALLEN

"Your tone will always be better when you're pushing air with real amps and speakers."

"That digital stuff doesn't sound as good as the real thing."

When people start making these kinds of statements, I immediately assume that they haven't taken the time to learn the software or that they are basing their comment on an experience they had many years ago with a piece of software when the software-modeling world was still in its infancy. The fact is that modeling software has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years and—in many real-world situations—it can sound even better and be a more suitable choice than traditional amplification.

For instance, let's say you're on tour and the whole band is using in-ear monitors. With direct software, you can keep your tone 100-percent consistent from show to show. Worn out tubes, lazy speakers, and tone-altering surges and sags caused from inconsistent venue power are all removed from the picture when you go direct. Also, audio afflictions, such as singers trying to get you to point your amp in a different direction or soundmen telling you to turn down because your amp is bleeding into the vocal mics, magically evaporate from the stage when you use modeling software. These are huge advantages.

So how can you get the best tone out of your modeling program? Whenever I use any modeling software, I always try to make sure I'm hearing with my ears and not my eyes. For instance, the Vox amp in the software may not always be the best starting place for getting the truest Vox-like tone. That chimey London grit you're looking for might actually come from a Fender amp model through a Marshall cabinet, so don't rule out any choices until you've given them a thorough listen. The best way to make your own great sounding presets within your modeling software is to do it the same way the modeling professionals do it, which is to compare your modeled tone with a real amp tone and tweak until you can't tell the difference between the two sounds.

The basic idea works like this: Set up three tracks in your Pro Tools session. (I'm using Pro Tools to illustrate the process, but other recording software will work the same way.)

Guitar modeling software such as Line 6's Gearbox Gold allows you to tweak virtual amp settings—including gain, and EQ—as well as emulate stompboxes, speaker cabinets, mics, and mic positions.

Name one track "DI," the second "Amp," and the third track "Model." Go out of your guitar into a DI box. The signal from this DI device goes straight to the computer and gets routed to the track called "DI."

Next, run a signal out of the DI box's Thru jack into the front of your amp. Mic up your amp and dial up the best tone you can. Arm both tracks—"DI" and "Amp"—and record a minute or two of your playing. At this point, you'll already have your reference tone ("Amp") recorded and you can start reamping your "DI" track thru your modeling software.

The advantage here is that your hands are free to try different cabinets, amps, and microphones, and to adjust other EQ parameters while the computer plays your DI track back through the modeling software for you. Also, this allows you to really focus on listening without having to play. Once you think you're in the right tonal ballpark, bus your "DI" track, which should be going through the modeling software, to the "Model" track. Now, A/B the "Model" and "Amp" tracks and see how similar they are tonally.

Make the necessary adjustments and keep comparing and tweaking until you have reached sonic uniformity between the two sounds. This process is also beneficial because it can help you become more knowledgeable about other aspects of your guitar tone beyond amps, guitars, and pedals. Being able to simulate different mic models and positions at the click of a mouse is a great way to start getting a general idea of how certain mics and mic placements will affect your final tone.

Along with being a way to have a portable live rig, my direct setup is a great way to do eSessions in my hotel room while I'm on the road. A producer can email me a stereo mix of a song he's working on and all I have to do is drag the stereo mix into a Pro Tools session, set up a couple of guitar tracks, fire up the modeling program, and start playing. I don't have to worry about disturbing neighboring hotel guests or dealing with the hassle of capturing my amp's tone with a bunch of outboard gear and mics. Yes, we're all accustomed to the tone of our favorite amp, but which rig is more convenient and appropriate to take out of the trailer and haul up to your hotel room so you can work on tracks late at night? Would this be your 100-watt half-stack in hulky roadcases or your six-pound laptop?

It's fascinating to see how companies create modeled tones. Go to wavesgtr.com and watch *The Making of GTR3* video to get an in-depth look at how amp models are captured using real amps, microphones, and cabinets. There are several companies making great programs, so do some research and figure out which one best suits your sonic needs and budget. Once you get a grip on the basic functionality of the software, you'll have a whole new world of programmable guitar tones at your disposal.

If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to investigate the world of digital modeling. Rather than choose a side and become an analog or digital purist, I believe it makes more sense to know how to get the most out of classic analog gear *and* be well-educated on how to navigate cutting-edge digital technology.

PAUL "TFO" ALLEN *is a multi-instrumentalist who has worked with Big & Rich, Adele, Sebastian Bach, 112, Jake Owen, Larry the Cable Guy, and many others. He also has his own project called Ten Finger Orchestra, and can be reached at tenfingerorchestra@yahoo.com.*

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EXPLORING IMPULSE RESPONSE REVERB BY RICH TOZZOLI

The reality of TV composing—or any modern music production, for that matter—is that it usually involves a fair amount of DI (aka direct injection) work. By that, I simply mean there's no amp involved. You plug a guitar directly into a preamp, DI box, or console, and use amp-simulating software to get your tone. While the sound of amp simulators gets better each year, to my ears the Achilles heel has always been reverb. Simulated reverb tends to sound artificial, especially when you're used to hearing the real thing. But I've discovered a few ways to get around that.

Audio Ease's Altiverb convolution reverb plug-in loaded with a Fender Super Reverb impulse response.

One of my favorite ways to generate reverb in a DI recording situation is to use *impulse response* (IR) reverb. IR plug-ins—such as Audio Ease Altiverb, Waves IR1 Parametric Convolution Reverb, and McDSP Revolver—use a process called "convolution" to digitally sample real spaces and hardware units. This can be done by either running a sine wave into the hardware, or sweeping a tone in the actual space itself and capturing the results to disk with microphones. That waveform is then put through a process called deconvolution, which leaves you with an impulse response. Adding IR to your signal can make it sound like you're actually playing in the given space or running through a plate or spring reverb device. Calling up a sampled space or unit within a plug-in gives you access to some really sweet reverb sounds.

Another great thing about these reverbs is that you can download fresh IRs and install them as needed. For example, Altiverb has a set of IRs called "Joe Gore's Crap IR Reverb Set." Gore's submitted set includes samples of Fender Super Reverb, Magnatone, and Baldwin Professional amps, as well as two classic rackmount spring-reverb devices—a Tube Works RT-921 Real Tube Reverb and Furman RV-1. He created these IRs by sweeping a sine wave into each unit and recording it back into Pro Tools with a pair of AKG 414s.

Before using impulse response reverb, I first remove any reverb from the path of the guitar-amp simulator. Then I create a stereo auxiliary track in Pro Tools (you can also create aux tracks in other leading recording software) and insert Altiverb. Next, I load up the Fender Super Reverb IR and send some of the plug-in guitar sound to it using an aux send from the guitar channel. The aux send itself then controls the amount of Fender reverb sound. If you push it up, it gets wetter. Lowering it decreases the send and, therefore, the amount of 'verb. The sound is very cool and quite authentic. In the context of a mix, you might never realize the guitar sound is from an amp plug-in.

To get even more authentic, I'll pan the stereo Altiverb plug-in to identically match the mono guitar track. This way, it sounds more like a mic'd guitar amp. Think about the fact that, when using stereo reverb, you're often sending a mono guitar into a stereo reverb and artificially widening the sound field. If you stick an SM57 in front of an amp, you'll have a mono guitar sound in one pan position within the stereo field. That mono mic'ing is what I often simulate by panning the IR return to the exact pan position of the dry guitar.

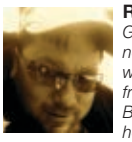
If I'm not seeking an authentic amp-reverb sound and want to widen my mono image, I leave the IR reverb panned full left and right. That maximizes the sense of reverb width around the guitar.

Another trick I use is to place a mono-to-stereo reverb plug-in directly after the mono guitar-amp plug-in. That effectively takes a mono channel (the guitar) and creates faux stereo with it. This places the guitar's mono audio inside a stereo field within the plug-in itself.

Note that when you place a plug-in directly on a track (as opposed to using an aux send to feed a stereo aux channel), you'll need to adjust the wet/dry mix. With 100 percent wet, you'll have a washy signal swimming in reverb. To avoid this, you need to play with the balance between the dry signal and reverb sound until you're satisfied. Typically, this means the dry signal is predominant. As you "dry" up the sound, it will create a tighter blend of guitar and reverb.

With this technique, I'll often use a small room IR and set the wet/dry mix to about 30/70. This takes a dry, mono guitar and places it inside a stereo room. Also note that you don't have to have IR reverbs to use this technique. You can use any software reverb you like, as long as it sounds good. When done correctly, it can be quite convincing.

So the next time you plug into an amp simulator and aren't happy with the reverb, try something different. Send the signal to an impulse response reverb and load up a real amp, room, or plate. In the production world, there's nothing quite like it.



RICH TOZZOLI *is a Grammy-nominated engineer and mixer who has worked with artists ranging from Al Di Meola to David Bowie. A life-long guitarist, he's also the author of Pro Tools Surround Sound Mixing and composes for the likes of Fox NFL, Discovery Channel, Nickelodeon, and HBO.*

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT GIG

BY DAN BERKOWITZ

In the August issue of *Premier Guitar*, my column "Risk ... and Survival" considered a bassist's risks for taking on new gigs, along with some tips for how to come through it all with a happy ending. In the same issue, an interview with the legendary bassist Stanley Clarke concluded with his statement, "Don't pass up nothin'. If you have the ability to try it out, try it out."

Frank—a *PG* reader from Portland, Oregon—emailed me shortly after the issue came out and suggested considering new musical possibilities according to the "opportunity cost" involved. The term sounded familiar—something out of my undergrad economics class way back when—but it was lost in the cobwebs of my mind. To recall the concept, I did a quick search and landed on About.com's economics section, which offered this plain-language explanation:

Unlike most costs discussed in economics, an opportunity cost is not always a number. The opportunity cost of any action is simply the next best alternative to that action, or put more simply, "What you would have done if you didn't make the choice that you did."

And there you have it. Opportunity cost is a way of assessing potential gigs based on the musical, rather than monetary gains you might receive from choosing among them.

As a semi-pro player, *pay* is rarely at the top of my list of choice factors. If I took gigs based solely on pay, I'd be gigless. It's a rare gig that pays enough to turn me into a bass mercenary, but when I do run across one of those unusual opportunities, I start wondering how the other factors will weigh in. A perfect example is a corporate gig that pays well, but involves a night of constantly being told to turn down, receiving painful requests, and getting the second-class treatment of eating dried-out sandwiches while standing in the kitchen. On the other hand, if the gig means playing with some really hot musicians, it might be a different story.

Personal growth is often one of my top choice factors. When I can play with musicians a step above me in their abilities, the adrenaline starts pumping and I'll try my best to stay sharp the whole night. If the gig is a rousing success, I'll temporarily bask in the glory. And if I hit some snags, it's time for a large serving of humble pie and a new practice agenda to build up lagging skills. In any case, this is a time for putting on the poker face, learning not to wince when I hit a clunker, and turning mistakes into new ideas.

Safety may not always come to mind right away, but I've played a few gigs I've regretted—gigs where someone insisted on sitting in, people were falling-down drunk, or attendees getting a little combative when their repeated requests got overlooked. I once played a biker gig with a "Neutral Territory" sign posted, and I remember really hoping they meant it. Likewise, if it's a rowdy, crowded bar with a tight band space, I have to hope my gear will survive without getting knocked over and busted up.

The longer I play, the more *fun* fits into my opportunity-cost evaluation. I'd rather play for low pay and high fun than vice-versa. Fun does not necessarily equate with audience size, either. If a small audience is really digging it, I go home happy. If the music really gels and I connect with the other band members, that equals fun. I remember one bar gig where a group of exotic dancers stopped in after work and showed off some of their talents. Now that was interesting *and* fun.

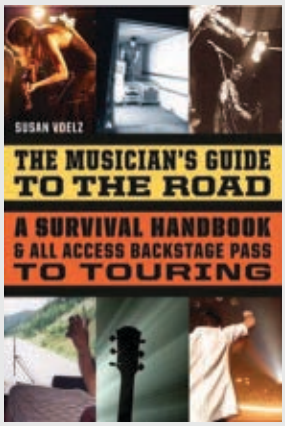
The older I get, the less patience I have for the *hassle* factor. I need more pay from a gig to drive a couple hours late at night than I used to. Likewise, I'm not that enthused about playing a gig with a big lineup of bands that requires waiting around for one, short set that hardly pays. Hauling heavy PA gear has lost the appeal it once had too—just another hassle. Loud gigs at crowded, noisy bars—ditto. Give me a club with good acoustics, an in-house PA with a pleasant, experienced sound tech, a roomy stage, and an appreciative audience. With all that, I might even think about paying to play!

Finally, there are the *feel-good rewards*. Sure, these gigs don't pay well—or at all. But the audiences, such as they are, are happy you've come to help make their benefit a better event. For the band, there are the usual gear-hauling hassles and some inexperienced people running the show, but it's also a chance to try out some new tunes—or work out the between-gig rust—in a low-risk setting. At the end of your set, you'll feel that you've given back a little of what you've received over the years. It's also possible that an audience member might talk to you about a future booking. If you go into a feel-good gig with a positive outlook, you'll reap the rewards.

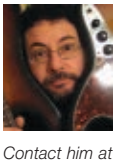
So there's my system for deciding which gigs to take on and which ones to let pass. You might put together a somewhat different list and weigh the factors differently. But when you carefully consider the opportunity cost of potential gigs overall, you can take what your gut tells you and bring it to a well-reasoned conclusion.

Cost Assessment Factors for Potential Gigs

Pay: What will I see in dollars at the end of the night?
Personal Growth: What will I be learning from this musical experience?
Safety: Is there a chance of physical harm to my gear and/or my body?
Fun: Will I go home with a big smile on my face?
Hassle: How much driving, hauling gear, and waiting around will I have to deal with?
Feel-good rewards: Will I be playing a charity benefit for a cause I really support?



Looking to tour? In *The Musician's Guide to the Road: A Survival Handbook & All Access Backstage Pass to Touring*, author Susan Voelz (a Grammy-nominated violinist who has worked with Alejandro Escovedo, Poi Dog Pondering, John Mellencamp, Giant Sand, and many others) offers valuable tips and humorous insights about life as a traveling musician. This 272-page manual from Billboard Books will help you stay sane.



DAN BERKOWITZ *is a professor by day and a bassist when the sun goes down. He plays upright and electric bass for blues, jazz, orchestra, and musical theater. Contact him at profdanb@gmail.com.*

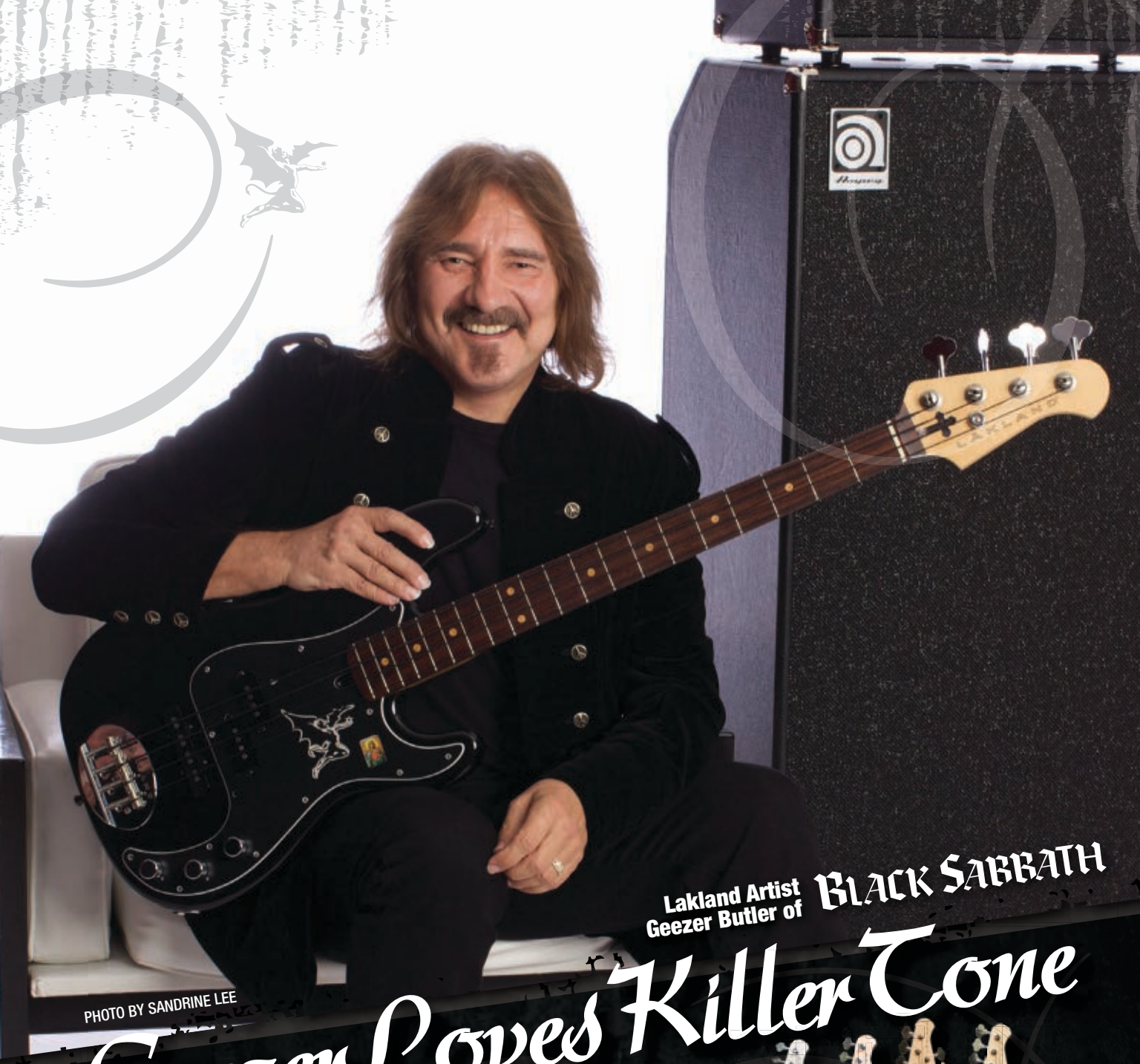


PHOTO BY SANDRINE LEE

Lakland Artist
Geezer Butler of BLACK SABBATH

Geezer Loves Killer Tone

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame artist Geezer Butler knows exactly what he likes in a bass guitar. He's even designed several of his own throughout his career with Black Sabbath, Geezer Butler Band, G/Z/R and Heaven & Hell; searching for the right feel, playability, aesthetics and of course, tone.

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SILENCE IS GOLDEN BY MITCH GALLAGHER

The electric guitar can be a noisy beast. I'm not talking about the amount of musical volume it can generate (we generally don't refer to that as "noise," though innocent neighbors and long-suffering family members may disagree). I'm talking about the unwanted variety of noise that can accompany an electric guitar—buzz, hum, hiss, radio stations, and more—all picked up by the guitar's pickups, its wiring, or something else in its signal chain. Onstage, that background noise can be an annoyance, but in many cases you can deal with it by simply ignoring it. However, in a recording situation, where every track is under microscopic scrutiny, any amount of noise can be noticeable and problematic. Let's look at ways we can reduce or eliminate the noise.

Let's begin at the source: the guitar itself. There are several ways that noise—EMI (electromagnetic interference) and RF (radio frequency) noise carried through the air—can get into an electric guitar rig's circuits. Any noise picked up will be amplified right along with the desirable sounds. And, the higher the gain, the more the signal and noise are amplified, and the louder the noise will seem.

Problem: The coils of wire used in a guitar pickup essentially function as antennae, picking up radio waves and other types of interference in the air.

Solutions: A humbucking pickup is the obvious solution, whether it's a traditional side-by-side or stacked single-coil design. Another solution is to equip your guitar with active pickups. But if your tone depends on a traditional single-coil—whether Fender-style or P-90 (in my opinion, the latter is noisier than the former)—then neither of those solutions will work for you. In this case, you might consider installing a dummy coil. The dummy coil doesn't pick up sound from the strings, rather it picks up the same unwanted noise picked up by the regular pickups and cancels it out. Suhr is one manufacturer that offers a dummy-coil solution (the BPSSC).

Another solution is a noise-suppressing device. One I've heard work well with single-coils is the Electro-Harmonix HumDebugger. I won't claim it is artifact-free when operating, but it does a decent job of fighting single-coil and P-90 hum.

In some cases, you may be able to control the amount of noise you're amplifying by simply changing the direction your guitar is facing—it all depends on where the noise is radiating from.

Problem: Like pickup coils, the other electronics in your guitar can also pick up airborne noise and send it along to the amplifier.

Solution: Shield the guitar to prevent noise from getting in. This entails wrapping the pickup and control cavities with metal foil or conductive tape and grounding it. Shielding can get a bad rap, as some players feel it changes the tone of the guitar. However, if shielding is done properly, it will not affect tone. If it isn't, it can function as a capacitor that sucks off top end.

Problem: You! We've all experienced how the noise a guitar produces drops dramatically as soon as you firmly make contact with the strings. This is because the strings are grounded to the amplifier. Most players assume that when you touch the strings, you ground the guitar. But this is backward—your body functions as an antenna, picking up noise. When you touch the strings (assuming the strings are grounded internally), the noise from your body is dumped to ground.

The Suhr BPSSC (Backplate Silent Single-Coil System) replaces the tremolo-spring cavity cover on a Strat-style guitar with a passive dummy-coil device. This dummy coil doesn't pick up string sounds, but cancels noise much like a humbucker. Photo courtesy of Suhr Guitars

Problem: Noisy pedals or noise resulting from the huge amount of amplification provided by overdrive, fuzz, and distortion pedals.

Solutions: Using the tips above, kill the noise before it enters the pedal. If there's no noise going into the pedal, a cleaner signal will come out. However, gain pedals—especially fuzzes and high-gain overdrives—can also generate their own noise. In this case, you need a noise suppressor after your gain pedals. There are two types of suppressors: a gate and a noise reducer. Gates work like a door that slams shut when no desired signal is present, cutting off the noise. Noise reduction systems pull down the level of the noise using various electronic techniques.

Gates can be tighter, but if they're not set correctly, decaying notes or quiet sounds you want to hear may get chopped off. Noise-reduction devices work best when the noise is "steady-state" or constant. The Rocktron Guitar Silencer and the Rocktron HUSH systems are two popular examples of noise-reduction units. Another affordable but effective solution is the Boss NS-2 Noise Suppressor stompbox.

Problem: Noisy amp—either the amp is picking up noise or its internal circuits are making noise of their own. One quick way to find out is to turn the amp on and crank it up with nothing plugged into its input. If you don't hear any noise, then the source is something plugged into the amp. If you hear noise with nothing plugged in, then the amp itself is the noise generator.

Solution: If the amp is making its own noise, there may not be a lot you can do other than look for noisy components—such as a bad tube—or see if moving the amp or reorienting it helps.

Your assignment for this month is to go through your rig and assess its noise level under different conditions. Once you know where the noise is coming from, you can take steps to control or remove it.

Next time around, we'll look at ways to deal with noise after the fact—after you've already made a recording, but you discover that there is a noise problem in your tracks.

MITCH GALLAGHER *is the former Editor in Chief of* EQ *magazine and the author of six books on recording and one instructional DVD on mastering. He operates MAG Media Productions and the Sound Sauna studio, and is Sweetwater's Editorial Director. His upcoming book is* Guitar Tone: Pursuing the Ultimate Electric Guitar Sound. *mitchgallagher.com*

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MIRROR INDUSTRIES BY KEVIN BOLEMBACH

Before I started working in the musical-instrument business, I played in a rock band called Non-Fiction that had both indie and major-label record deals. Compared to some signed bands, we really didn't accomplish all that much, but we did manage to put out three critically acclaimed albums, got our music played on the radio and on MTV, and toured all over the U.S. and Europe before we called it quits.

I remember speaking to a record-industry guru during that time who equated the success of a band to a giant jigsaw puzzle. He explained that you need several critical marketing "pieces" assembled in the right place and at the right time in order to create the complete picture of success.

For a band, these pieces used to consist of great music, wide-range distribution through record stores, radio and MTV airplay, consistent touring (preferably opening for a well-known headliner), and publicity in the form of exposure in magazines and other media. Nowadays, a few of these requirements have changed—or at least shifted their level of importance—but we'll get into that in a future column.

Unfortunately for Non-Fiction, we had all the pieces, but they were assembled so haphazardly that the full picture never took form. Our major-label CD came out before our managers could land a booking agent, so by the time we got a support slot on a tour, all the radio and retail promotions for the record were already over. The label also spent way too much money on a video that they couldn't get onto MTV. More than a year later, our guitarist called in a favor that got us some spins on *Headbangers Ball*, but by that time our label had gone belly-up and the band had pretty much imploded. As they say, timing is everything.

Having worked in the guitar effects industry for 15+ years, I've noticed that it shares some striking similarities with the record industry. As with a band, marketing a successful guitar effect is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, and it's necessary to have specific pieces of this marketing puzzle in place to score a "hit" with a stompbox. While the actual pieces may vary slightly between the two industries, they are close enough to effectively mirror one another.

Just as music has various genres, there are different types of guitar effects with their own particular sounds, and some of these categories of effects have decidedly more appeal than others. Based on sales data for the various brands that we've distributed, overdrive pedals consistently come in at the top of the food chain, year after year. Let's call them the pop music of the pedal industry—they're easy on the ears and carry a broad appeal, but they also play to a fickle audience whose tastes change almost daily.

As a rule, an overdrive sells better than a chorus pedal or octave divider—assuming, of course, that it's a quality product (though sometimes even *that* doesn't matter). In my experience, how well a given pedal sells correlates to what class of device it belongs to. Though it seems obvious, not everyone markets stompboxes with this in mind. For example, I'm puzzled (pun intended) by a certain boutique builder's emphasis on advertising its new phaser. As amazing as I'm sure it is, I doubt it's going to outsell the overdrives or boosters in their line. They seem to be pointing a lot of marketing dollars at a fairly small segment of the market.

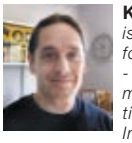
Why didn't Non-Fiction succeed with our album *Preface*? For one thing, though we had all the requisite puzzle pieces, they were assembled too haphazardly for the full picture to take form.

So, the broader the appeal of the pedal, the better chance it will sell well—wow, now there's a complex formula! Please note: I'm not trying to discourage builders from making the absolute craziest and most esoteric pedals imaginable. Bring 'em on! However, I would equate these types of effects to the indie bands and record labels of the '80s and '90s that had a more focused appeal and therefore a much smaller, niche audience.

Of course, an indie band can go on to become the next Nirvana, and boutique pedals can likewise become mainstream. This has happened with brands like Z.Vex, Fulltone, and Way Huge. All three were virtually unknown 10 or 15 years ago, while today they are household names (at least in guitarists' households).

Effect popularity can also change based on the type of music that's currently popular, which reveals an interesting symbiosis that exists between these two industries. A good example of this is the compressor: As country music (and hot Tele picking) has moved into the mainstream over the past 10 years, compressors have seen a renewed popularity and markedly increased sales. Compressors rank in the top three effect types, according to our company sales data.

In my next State of the Stomp installment, we'll explore some of the more specific pieces of the "effect success" puzzle and discover how they continue to mirror the record industry. We'll also discuss how this formula has changed over time with the advent of new technologies. See you next time.



KEVIN BOLEMBACH *is the President and founder of Godlyke, Inc. - the U.S.distributor for many well-know boutique effect brands Including Maxon, Guyatone, EMMA and Providence.*

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TO MOD OR NOT TO MOD? BY JOL DANTZIG

The link between guitars and cars has been discussed often. Who among us doesn't love swoopy sports cars, sick bobber bikes, or wicked hot rods? Flashy and loud, brimming with sex appeal, and plenty of geeky, mechanical specs to discuss—instruments and vehicles share many of the same characteristics. I've spent countless weekends at custom car shows or concours and vintage races while ogling fine machinery. Not surprisingly, I find that parallels exist right down to the way we personalize and modify our toys, as well as the attitudes about doing so.

In the automotive world, performance is what it's all about. Pumping up the intake pressure with turbos and superchargers to gain horsepower (can you say preamp?), or tuning an exhaust (choosing the right speaker cab) is just the beginning. We like to have controls in easy reach to negotiate tricky twists or turns, and pedals underfoot to jam on the brakes or power through straight passages. As you can see, I'm already letting my worlds collide.

Today, performance mods aren't considered radical, but almost a right. Everyone wants an edge over the competition, or maybe a little push over the cliff to get one's creative juices flowing. The game was on when big-band guitarists started stuffing phonograph needles into their guitars. Performance was what Randy Smith had in mind when he created cascading preamp sections for the first Boogies. It's what Jeff Beck (coincidentally an automobile hot-rodder himself) sought when he removed the covers from his Les Paul humbuckers to get a sonic leg up. Steve Miller and Boz Scaggs heaped extra pickups onto their semi-hollowbodies back in the heyday of Haight-Ashbury. Not to be outdone, Quicksilver's John Cipollina wove a dozen amps, cabinets, and controls together for his signature sound. A decade later, Edward Van Halen jammed a naked humbucker into his striped, hot-rodded guitar to get the sound he couldn't buy off-the-shelf. Like dropping a hemi into a '32 Ford, the replacement pickup is the musical equivalent of a motor transplant—the staple of a hot-rodder's vernacular.

Playing at your best requires you to be at ease with your instrument. The notes must fall beneath your fingers without difficulty. Similarly, rodders often modify vehicles to provide a pleasing or responsive ride. Even at the beginning of the electric guitar era, the lines were blurred between disciplines. Soon after the whammy bar was invented, Paul Bigsby and Leo Fender began to make tweaks to the design. Bigsby, a motorcycle fabricator himself, created elaborate, raw aluminum tremolo arms reminiscent of his Crocker motorcycle shifters. To improve comfort and fit, Fender curved and scalloped the bodies of the Stratocaster and Jazzmaster until they flowed like the long hoods of European racing cars. Indeed, one such 1960s design was named Jaguar and another, the Mustang, was adorned with racing stripes. Clearly, the pioneers of American electrics understood the relationship between guitars and cars.

Some would argue that it's sacrilege to corrupt a design from its stock configuration. This is a debate that can be heard at car shows as well as vintage guitar festivals.

When a mere mod won't do: The late John Cipollina—Quicksilver Messenger Service's inventive lead guitarist—built an amazing custom rig around a pair of Standel bass amps, a Fender Twin Reverb, a Fender Dual Showman, and a cluster of Wurlitzer horns. Photo and gear details courtesy of JohnCipollina.com, a memorial website

Personalization of material property is as old as creation, so why should instruments be immune? From the simple act of applying a sticker to elaborate inlays, engraving, or airbrushing graphics—guitars mimic vehicles in every way. Musicians see themselves as individual snowflakes and there's no better way to prove it—except playing—than accessorizing guitars. Like jewelry for your axe, there are countless hardware choices. Functional or merely cosmetic, the simple act of replacing a guitar's knobs, pickguard, or tuners can be a statement of identity similar to aftermarket wheels on a pimped ride.

Some would argue that it's sacrilege to corrupt a design from its stock configuration. This is a debate that can be heard at car shows as well as vintage guitar festivals. In 1988, for example, a 1973 Porsche 911 was merely a 15-year-old, used, foreign sports car. Then the *Miami Vice* crowd tore them apart and rebuilt them with bigger motors, sloped noses, fat fender-flares, and giant whale-tail spoilers. Rolling on their ultra-wide, gold-colored wheels, these modified icons of '80s style can now be had for the cost of an entry-level Toyota. In contrast, had such an example been left in its original form, it could be worth four times that amount—or more.

Similarly, it was common in the '70s to strip the finish off guitars for a more "natural" appearance. I recall using Zip-Strip to remove the olympic white finish from my early '60s J bass, reckoning the bare lumber would better complement my band's earthy vibe. I was personalizing my axe—which was just a $300 used instrument at the time—and the practice was consistent with the trend of the day. I was oblivious to the fact that in both the automotive and instrument world, a time-worn original is worth much more than a restored repaint—even with original parts intact. That Zip-Strip melted thousands of dollars off the J's future value, but at the time, I was happy in my ignorance.

The choice to modify any possession to make it more distinctive is a personal decision. There are those who have no use for an original 1932 Ford, but would cherish a chopped and channeled rat-rodded version. In turn, a 1956 Strat without a Floyd Rose might be useless to a metal guitarist. Is performance or vanity in the here-and-now more or less important than an uncertain future value? If I had it to do over again, would I have left my bass white?

JOL DANTZIG *is a noted designer, builder, and player who co-founded Hamer Guitars, one of the first boutique guitar brands, in 1973. Today, as the director of Dantzig Guitar Design, he continues to help define the art of custom guitar. To learn more, visit guitardesigner.com.*

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"THE RIGHT LOOK" IN GUITARS BY ERVIN SOMOGYI

I go to a lot of guitar shows. Some of the guitars I see have that certain something (some don't) and are visually appealing enough for me to approach and take a closer look. You've probably had the same experience, but what is it all about?

Well, it involves a package of visual impressions that my eyes seem to take in all at once. Though I believe most people are capable of taking in the same particular package of visual impressions all at once, they may not be consciously aware if they have not yet learned to pay attention. The package includes the proportions, lines, smoothness or lumpiness of the curves, harmony of color and texture, and the overall pleasingness. It's no different from the capacity for instant assessment of yummy-ness (or lack of it) that a man might make when he looks at a woman (or vice versa), or even a car or motorcycle. However, the sexual/sensual part of an assessment is usually less prominent when one looks at a guitar or the average painting. That desexualized version of one's personal assessment—fully valid in its own right—is what we call aesthetic appreciation, sense of appeal, or "the right look." And as far as we know, we are the only species capable of having such an experience.

Take a good look at these six images. From the standpoint of design (in the simplest and most basic sense of the word), which image does not belong with the others? In other words, as design projects, which of these images looks right and which one does not? When making your selection, be sure to disregard size, cost, age, whether it's exotic or common, familiar or unfamiliar, alive or dead, color, material (e.g., animal, vegetable, mineral, or synthetic), location, practical utility, caloric content, or social/cultural relevance. These things are all irrelevant to design essentials. We're merely looking for a basic feature or element of design that all but one of these images share. Take your time, look carefully, and try not to read my answer until you have one of your own. I'll give you my answer at the end of this column, and it's entirely possible you may come up with a different one.

When considering things, sizing them up, and making judgments, nature has basically given us two distinct ways of arriving at a truth. One way is to measure, calculate, or compare against a standard, or figure something out and arrive at the "correct" answer. One can also intuit a truth or have an insight about it, by knowing something without being able to explain how one knows it. Intuition has nothing to do with measuring, calculating, or comparing—there's something more direct, personal, and immediate about it. And while both methods are fully valid, neither one can be used to comprehend or explain the other. It's like engineering versus art. How can either one be wrong?

In the world of visual art and design (we'll get back to guitars in just a second), the main visual point is to arrive at the internal cues that signal "that's it, it's right, it's done, you can stop now." The striving can of course be modified by training and experience, but the artist stops only when he knows it's time to stop. Short of that, he keeps on working, expressing, and seeking. Likewise, the viewer knows when something grabs his attention fully, or doesn't. There is otherwise no calculation, clock, statistic, rule book, syllabus, recipe amount, blueprint, or deadline to otherwise tell either the artist or viewer that he or she has reached an optimal point. The technician, on the other hand, uses precisely these tools by following a different brain-map and a linear set of "performance instructions." He stops only when he has met the explicit requirements of his task.

This brings me back to the many guitars I see both at guitar shows and in stores. Some of them look right to me, and some of them really don't. The package of visual impressions includes the proportions of the body-width to the length, the smoothness or lumpiness of the curves as they morph into one another, the harmony and contrast of color in the woods, metal, or plastic, and the size of the peghead and bridge as part of the overall look. It all makes for an overall allure that enriches one's experience of a guitar that's made well. And that's what you react to differentially when you see it, because different guitars literally carry different amounts of it. Their makers put those things in there … or didn't.

Let's get back to the images mentioned at the beginning of this article. My aesthetic take on this is that the guitar does not belong. Why? Because none of its lines or line values are found in nature. It seems to be created with a compass and a straightedge by someone who decided that this is a proper or desirable look. It has all the necessary parts, yet it somehow looks stiff, artificial, and lacking in organic naturalness, flow, or harmony. The Mona Lisa, the guitar, and the baseball players are all man-made images, but the Mona Lisa and the baseball players don't strike the eye as artificial. Do you agree? I'm not saying artificial is bad—I'm just saying it's different. There's successful artificial and clumsy artificial. As we can see from this small sampling of images, some man-made quality works artistically and some of it doesn't. As a matter of fact, the entire design industry—from clothing and cars to toasters and architecture—is about producing man-made shapes that appeal. But that's a topic for a separate and longer article. The allure of a guitar, or lack of it, isn't accidental. Someone either put it in there, or forgot to.

ERVIN SOMOGYI
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TWEAKING A SILVERTONE 1484 BY JEFF BOBER

Hi Jeff,
The first decent amp I owned was a Silvertone Twin-Twelve 1484 I bought from my guitar teacher in 1967 for $100. At some point I traded it, but I've missed it. Now I'm in my second childhood, so I just got one that appears to have been made in 1965. It has all the original components and needs a cap job and general maintenance. The reverb and tremolo work fairly well, but could be stronger. Do you have any suggestions for making this amp all it can be? I just want the amp to be as robust as I can make it, so I can crank it up and enjoy the sound. I know the 1965 Jensens won't take a lot of abuse, so I would play through another cabinet with relatively new speakers when cranking it up.

Are there any different values you'd suggest for the 100 µF 150 VDC filter caps or any of the other components? In addition to the filter caps, there is a 5-10-20 µF 450 VDC can cap. I can't find a source anywhere that has those values. Do you know of one? Or if not, what available can cap would you suggest? Also, are there any mods you'd suggest?

I've been working on amps for about three years now, and I'm at the point where I can do basic amp troubleshooting, cap jobs, etc. If I'm not comfortable attempting anything you suggest, I'll take it to an experienced amp tech. Thanks!
—Dave Ellis

Hi Dave,
Thanks for writing. I actually owned a 1484 head years ago and wish I still had it. Just the fact that you could turn the volume control off and turn the reverb control up to get nothing but cavernous, sci-fi reverb made it cooler than most other amps. Another cool fact: The 1484 is almost identical to the higher-powered 1485 favored by Jack White. The 1485 has four 6L6 output tubes, double the power, and four *more* speakers! Yes, the 1485 had six 10" speakers. But hey, those two vintage 12" Jensens in your amp are pretty sweet, too.

You mentioned the amp needs a cap job. In 1484s, the filter capacitors in the initial section of the power supply are crucial. This power supply employs a very nontraditional voltage-doubler type of circuit. In fact, it employs *two* voltage-doubler circuits running off two separate secondary taps of the mains transformer. These circuits are placed in series and the voltages add to develop the 480 VDC plate voltage stated on the schematic. If these capacitors are dried out and underperforming, the proper voltages will not develop, resulting in low plate voltage and low output. Replacing the four 100 µF 150V caps in the voltage-doubler circuit generally improves performance.

If you can source a slightly higher capacitance or higher voltage, feel free to do so. While the original capacitors are mounted in an area that initially may have been a tight squeeze, newer capacitors are physically smaller so you might be able to install higher-value capacitors in the same space. Substantially larger capacitance values, however, may adversely affect the amp's tone and response, so don't go overboard.

Regarding the 5-10-20 "Twist Lock" can cap in the power supply: Sorry, I don't know where to find any. Through an extensive search, you may find a New Old Stock (NOS) version somewhere, but I'd strongly recommend properly re-forming the cap. Even then, its performance may be suspect. Instead, I'd recommend installing discrete 5, 10, and 20 µF 450V caps. (If you can't find a 5 µF 450V cap, an 8 µF would work fine.)

Remove the wires from each terminal of the can cap and connect them to the positive side of the appropriate replacement caps. Don't forget to connect any applicable resistors between the appropriate capacitors. Connect all the negative leads to ground (it's generally best to keep ground connections as close to the original capacitor as possible, but space doesn't always allow for this). If there's room to install a terminal strip for all these cap connections, that would be great, but I doubt there will be. Just remember to do neat work, keep leads as short as possible, insulate as necessary, and find a way to anchor the caps to something rigid via wire ties, silicone glue, or some other appropriate method. Also, while you're there, you should replace the 100 µF 50V cap in the bias supply. If this cap is bad or weak, it will cause additional hum in the output stage.

The 1484's output transformer is a bit small, so I'd be careful not to run the amp at high volumes for extended periods. That said, there is a simple mod that will give you more gain, as well as two different-sounding channels. R22 and R23 on the schematic are the cathode resistors for the second 12AX7 in the circuit. Parallel a 0.47 capacitor across R22 and a 2.2 µF capacitor across R23 (watch the polarity—positive side toward the tube). This will increase gain in both channels, with channel 1 being brighter and channel 2 being more full bodied.

Here's another quick mod. The 1484's standby switch is different than most: It does not disable the high voltage—it simply cancels the signal going to the output tubes. Try removing the switch and replacing it with a 1 Meg linear pot. Connect the two wires that were attached to the switch to the pot, one on the wiper and one on the CCW leg. Turning the pot all the way down will yield the same result as the original standby switch, while turning it up will control the amount of signal going to the output tubes.

Back in the day, if the Silvertone 1484 wasn't enough, you could crank up its big brother—the mighty 1485. This beast sported six Jensen 10" speakers and pumped out 120 watts of vintage tube tone. Photo courtesy of Fargen Amplification

Hopefully, the capacitor mod will give you more gain in the front end so you don't have to push the output stage so hard. That said, there's nothing like the sound of output tubes distorting, so if you need to crank it, go ahead. Luckily Mercury Magnetics makes replacement transformers for these amps, too.

There you go. I'll bet Jack White doesn't have these mods!

JEFF BOBER, *one of the godfathers of the low-wattage amp revolution, co-founded and was the principal designer for Budda Amplification. Jeff launched EAST Amplification in 2010, and he can be reached at pgampman@gmail.com.*

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ORANGE

THE STRATOCASTER "JAZZ SWITCH" MOD BY DIRK WACKER

This month we're checking out another Strat mod that's very easy to do and that offers a lot of utility. And it's cheap! All you need for this mod is a simple on/off toggle and a capacitor—that's it. The idea is based on the stock Fender Telecaster wiring from the early '50s.

As you may know, until 1967 Fender used a different wiring for Telecasters than the scheme we know today. On standard modern Teles, the wiring is bridge pickup alone, both pickups together in parallel, and neck pickup alone. But prior to 1967, Fender used the following wiring: bridge pickup alone, neck pickup alone, and neck pickup alone with an additional 0.1 µF cap engaged. (We'll explore this old-school Tele wiring in a future column, when we switch from Stratocaster to Telecaster mods.)

In Fender literature from the era, this neck-pickup-plus-capacitor wiring was described as a "pre-set bassy sound," and the idea came from Leo Fender himself. Leo believed guitarists should have the capability of playing bass lines without switching instruments. After experimenting, he came up with this solution and the result was a boomy, bassy tone that didn't require an additional tone knob. This was intended as a "bass preset" that would allow a guitarist to simply flip the 3-way pickup selector to enter bass territory. For this reason, the mod I'm about to describe is often called the "bass switch mod."

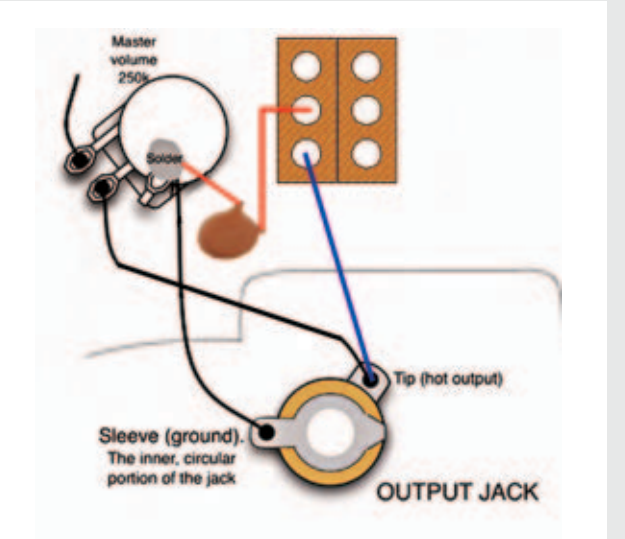
The preset idea is something Fender used in several other guitars as well, including the Jaguar. However, it turned out Tele players didn't want to play bass lines, and once the Fender P bass was invented (it came soon after the Telecaster), this bass preset remained mostly unused or fell victim to early modifications. When Fender finally changed the wiring, it was a concession to countless customers' demands and an admission that this preset tone was more or less unusable.

After 1967, this wiring option was almost forgotten. But in the early '80s, adventurous jazz players like Mike Stern discovered that old Telecasters made a durable alternative to an expensive archtop jazz box. Suddenly, the old Fender preset wiring was something desirable and practical. It worked perfectly for those dark, jazzy tones certain guitarists were looking for, and a new hype was born. Some players stayed with the stock Fender wiring, while others started to experiment with different cap styles and values. Leo Fender never intended his wiring for this kind of "abuse," but even today, it's the standard for a lot of jazz players all around the world. So if you want to throw in some cool jazz lines without messing with your Strat's tone knobs, this preset mod is for you.

I've adapted the preset to accommodate any Stratocaster wiring and to work in conjunction with all the standard 5-way-switch pickup combinations. To summarize: You won't lose a switching position on the 5-way switch, yet you'll receive a lot of different new tones because the mod works with all pickup combinations. To mimic old-style jazz tones, people recommend using the Strat's neck pickup, but I also like using the bridge-and-middle pickup combination with this mod.

First, you'll need an on/off switching device. You can use a mini toggle (which is what I prefer) or any kind of push/pull or push/push pot. The advantage of using a pot is that your Strat will remain visually unaltered.

Second, you'll need an extra capacitor to throw into the circuit. This area offers a lot of opportunity to experiment. You can try different cap styles—like paper-in-oil caps, foil/film caps, old-style paper-waxed caps, ceramic, and so on. For this application on a Stratocaster, I prefer the warm and growly character of new-old-stock (NOS) paper-in-oil caps. But there's no right or wrong—it's only the tone that matters, so if you like it, use it.



The "jazz switch" mod for the Fender Strat. Wiring diagram courtesy of Seymour Duncan Pickups and used with permission

A cap's value (or capacitance, to be more precise) provides even more options to tinker with. You can stick with the original Fender value of 0.1 µF, but most players feel this is over the top and simply generates too much bass. A good range to experiment with is from 5000 pF up to 0.05 µF—and everything in between. The results depend on a lot of factors, such as the pickups, the Strat's neck and body woods, your cable, and your amp settings. With a Strat, I find NOS 0.05 µF paper-in-oil caps sound good with any Fender amp. Marshall players should lower the value a little—0.033 µF is a good compromise.

Technically, this mod is very simple. Flipping the switch, you engage the additional capacitor and send some highs to ground. Just how much depends on the capacitance of the cap you choose. Think of it as a slimmed-down version of the Gibson Varitone circuit, which is based on the same principle but uses a rotary switch to dial in several different caps to achieve different tones. (We'll talk about the Varitone circuit in a future column on Gibson mods.)

After you've installed the switching device of your choice, you only need to connect the capacitor to the switch, with the other side of the cap going to ground. Connect the other switch lug to the hot lug of the output jack, where it joins the wire coming from the volume pot. Done! The diagram shows how to connect everything. [A larger image is available in the online version of this month's column.]

This mod isn't difficult, and it enhances your tonal palette—especially when you want to throw in some jazz lines. Stay tuned for more Strat mods coming next month. Until then, keep on modding!

DIRK WACKER *lives in Germany and is fascinated by anything related to old Fender guitars and amps. He plays country, rockabilly, and surf music in two bands, works regularly as a session musician for a local studio, and writes for several guitar mags. He's also a hardcore guitar and amp DIY-er who runs an extensive website—singlecoil.com—on the subject.*

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SX CALLISTO JR BY WILL RAY

Okay, I confess: I do a daily search for SX guitars on eBay. Why? Because I've owned SX axes before and know they're built solid and they're *cheap*. I was first turned on to SX guitars by my neighbor Martin, who started buying them four years ago. Whenever I played one of his SX electrics, I was always surprised at their quality relative to their price. So I bought my first SX a few years ago just to test the waters and was quietly blown away. I currently own four SX guitars . . . and counting.

This SX model really captured my attention when I saw it floating around on the 'Bay. Obviously inspired by a Les Paul Special, this baby has a set neck (no bolt-on here!), two P-90-style pickups, a rosewood fretboard, jumbo frets, and a "TV yellow" finish. An outfit in California called Rondo Music sold these guitars brand-spanking-new for $135, plus $20 shipping. Say *what*? How can anyone make a profit on that? Sorry, man—not my problem. I'm a bottom feeder. So I pulled the trigger on one.

Whenever you upgrade pickups on a cheap guitar, you never get your money back when you sell it later.

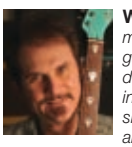
The guitar arrived a week later, well boxed. When I unpacked it, I'm sure my face showed some disappointment. The classic "TV yellow" color was actually closer to "crime-scene-tape yellow"—a much brighter yellow than I remembered in the photos. I sighed and chalked it up to the unpredictable ways digital cameras and computer monitors display color.

When I started playing this SX, things got better fast. It seemed to have a comfortable neck very similar to my 1990s Gibson LP Special. The jumbo frets were smooth and rounded, the 12" fretboard radius felt nice to bend strings on, and the pickups sounded very good, with that pronounced midrange P-90 honk I so like. Some players buy these guitars and replace the pickups with authentic Gibson P-90s, but I say, "Why bother?" These sound close enough.

Bottom Feeder Tip # 2387: If the original pickups sound decent, leave well enough alone. Whenever you upgrade pickups on a cheap guitar, you never get your money back when you sell it later. Never.

So what's the verdict—is it a keeper? Hmm. Not really sure yet. It plays and sounds great, but I still have trouble with the color. I'm hoping the bright yellow will fade over time. For now, this guitar is in my "maybe" pile.

1. This SX LP Special TV is clearly a budget repro of Gibson's iconic Les Paul Special in TV yellow. When Gibson first introduced this color in the 1950s, the goal was to create a finish that would look good viewed on a black-and-white television. A white finish was too bright for the cameras of the day to accurately capture, whereas yellow translated well on the tube. **2.** Many budget guitars sport a bolt-on neck, but this SX has a set neck—which is essential if you want to emulate the sound of a Les Paul Special. **3.** Some guitarists routinely upgrade the pickups on a budget instrument, but the P-90-style pickups on this SX have enough midrange honk to keep me happy.



WILL RAY *is a founding member of the Hellecasters guitar-twang trio. He also does guitar clinics promoting his namesake G&L signature model 6-string, and produces artists and bands at his studio in Asheville, North Carolina. You can contact Will on Facebook and at willray.biz.*

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1937 MARTIN D-28

This 1937 Martin D-28—serial #66725—has the iconic dreadnought body style that epitomizes the flattop steel-string guitar.

BY DAVE ROGERS, LAUN BRAITHWAITE, AND TIM MULLALLY

More than 70 years after its first appearance, the dreadnought remains the most popular flattop body style among acoustic guitarists. The big-body dreadnought (named after the HMS Dreadnought, a revolutionary British battleship launched in 1906) was originally designed by C.F. Martin & Company in 1916 for the Oliver Ditson Company of Boston. These guitars were sold under the Ditson brand until the late 1920s, when Ditson went out of business.

At the time, Martin believed such a large guitar produced too much bass and spoiled the delicate balance of the Martin sound. This philosophy changed during the hard times of the Great Depression, which started in 1929. The slowdown in business motivated the family-owned company to try new ideas to keep musicians interested in Martin instruments. One of these ideas was to release dreadnought-size guitars in 1931 under the Martin brand.

This month's 1937 Martin D-28 has the classic features that make it among the most celebrated guitars of the Golden Era. These include a spruce top with Brazilian rosewood back and sides, scalloped X bracing (until 1944), a "belly" bridge (introduced on Martins in 1929), 14 frets clear of the body (a 1934 innovation), a mahogany neck with an ebony fretboard, diamond-shaped fretboard inlays (until 1944), and herringbone top trim (offered until 1946).

If you're interested in exploring the history of the mighty D-28 and other classic Martin steel-strings, you'll find a wealth of information in the two-volume *Martin Guitars: A History Revised and Updated* by Richard Johnston, Dick Boak, and Mike Longworth, *Martin Guitars: An Illustrated Celebration of America's Premier Guitarmaker* by Jim Washburn and Richard Johnston, and in *The Martin Book* by Walter Carter.

DAVE'S GUITAR SHOP
Dave Rogers' collection is tended by Laun Braithwaite and Tim Mullally and is on display at:
Dave's Guitar Shop
1227 Third Street South
La Crosse, WI 54601
davesguitar.com
Photos by Mullally and text by Braithwaite.

TOP: With their slender buttons, the vintage tuners enhance the elegant simplicity of this D-28's headstock. **MIDDLE:** Like modern D-28s, this vintage beauty has a solid spruce top, an ebony "belly" bridge, and a 14-fret neck joint. **INSET:** This D-28's Brazilian rosewood back and sides make it particularly desirable to collectors and players alike.

GIBSON VS. EPIPHONE— ARE *WE* THE ONES BEING ELITIST?

BY ZACHARY FJESTAD

A question I often receive goes something like this: "I have a Gibson Epiphone guitar and I've heard they're worth a lot of money! It looks like a Les Paul and has a serial number of S9312XXXX. What's this Gibson worth?" I'm sure I've broken many hearts by informing the owner that it's worth just a few hundred bucks, because it really isn't a Gibson. It also became apparent to me that many people don't really know the difference between Gibson and Epiphone, or how the two fit together. Is Gibson always considered a treasure and is an imported Epiphone always considered trash? The answer isn't quite that simple.

Gibson has been building guitars since 1894 and the name is generally synonymous with a quality, valuable, and great-playing guitar. Epiphone was another successful guitar manufacturer during the first half of the 20th century. But after the hardships of World War II, illnesses and death in the Epiphone family, and severe labor issues at the Epiphone factory in the '50s, the company found themselves falling behind. Gibson President Ted McCarty, who had previously expressed interest in buying a portion of Epiphone, ended up purchasing the entire company in 1957.

It was decided that Epiphone would be re-established as a first-rate guitar manufacturer so that Gibson's parent company, CMI (Chicago Musical Instruments), could offer a product comparable in every way to Gibson. This arrangement was set up by Gibson primarily to offer comparable Epiphone guitars to the music stores that were not allowed to carry the exclusive Gibson line. Though Epiphone was set up as an autonomous company in a separate part of the Gibson complex, parallel product lines were soon established, and Gibson was essentially competing with itself.

When the guitar boom of the '60s slowed toward the end of that decade, every guitar manufacturer felt the pinch. Gibson was no different, and they were struggling to keep Epiphone alive. In 1970, Gibson decided to move all Epiphone production from the US to Japan, and since then, nearly all Epiphones have been produced in various Asian countries. It wasn't until 1986 when Henry Juszkiewicz, David Berryman, and Gary Zebrowksi purchased Gibson that Epiphones slowly became the budget brand of Gibson.

Because Gibson generally produces expensive guitars, the company has wisely offered budget lines of instruments through the years, including the Kalamazoo, Recording King, and Cromwell brands. With the rise of imported guitars during the '70s and '80s, the new management team at Gibson decided to use the oft-neglected Epiphone brand for their Gibson-style budget models. By the late '80s, Les Pauls, Flying Vs, SGs, and other Gibson models were being produced with an Epiphone logo.

Gibson has found a winning combination by using Epiphone not only for budget versions of Gibson models, but also for producing reissues of popular Epiphone models from the '50s and '60s. They have also used the brand for some higher-end guitars including their Elitist and Masterbilt Series. A few Epiphones are still made in the US at Gibson's factory.

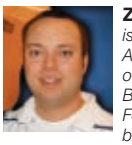
Since Epiphone became Gibson's budget brand in 1986, you may ask what the main difference is between the two. Country of origin is certainly the number one difference.

TOP: A sweet Gibson Les Paul Standard. **BOTTOM:** Epiphone's version of the iconic Les Paul Standard.

However, Gibson rarely admits that, and according to a 1998 piece of Epiphone literature called "Ask Dr. Epiphone," one question asks, "What are the differences between an Epiphone Les Paul and a Gibson Les Paul?" It's a good question and here's the answer, according to Dr. Epiphone: "Our Epiphone Les Paul guitars are built 100 percent to Gibson Les Paul specifications. However, an Epiphone Les Paul is different from a Gibson Les Paul in the following main areas: In general our [Epiphone] instruments are about 1/3 to 1/2 the cost of Gibson guitars. Therefore, we have to make some adjustments to the specifications in order to be able to offer our customers this kind of value." Dr. Epiphone goes on to say that these adjustments include fewer inlays, a thinner maple-veneer top, and the use of chrome hardware instead of gold. There is no mention of where the guitars are actually made.

Today, it's no secret that almost every major guitar manufacturer is building in or at least offering guitars for sale that are built in Asia. With the average price-point of an electric guitar dropping to $357 in 2010, it is simply a way for guitar manufacturers to remain competitive in the 21st-century business landscape. Epiphones that are built in the image of popular Gibson models are becoming even more similar, and if not for the headstock logo, it's difficult to differentiate the two. Try playing the instruments without looking at the headstock and let the sound and playability guide your purchasing decision.

Over the course of 100 years, the Epiphone brand has been associated with many different levels of guitars—from $200 beginner models to the archtops of the early 20th century that are worth several thousand dollars. The bottom line is that you can't just look at the headstock to determine if your guitar is worth something or not. After all, is a Geo really considered a Chevrolet? Just because the truss rod cover says Gibson doesn't mean it's a Gibson.



ZACHARY R. FJESTAD *is author of Blue Book of Acoustic Guitars, Blue Book of Electric Guitars, and Blue Book of Guitar Amplifiers. For more information, visit bluebookinc.com or email Zach at guitars@bluebookinc.com.*

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REFRETTING A '72 GIBSON LES PAUL DELUXE BY JOHN BROWN

If you've been reading this column recently, you'll recall we're in the middle of restoring a '72 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe. In my September 2011 column, I took you through the evaluation process we used to determine exactly what this restoration would entail. In October's column, I covered extracting the flat and pitted frets, and explained how I prepped and skimmed the rosewood fretboard to remove any micro high spots.

When you're dealing with vintage guitars, some clients don't want us to even take a polishing cloth to the instrument, because it changes the mojo for them. So when it came to micro-spot sanding this LP's fretboard, I made sure the owner was okay with the procedure. [If you missed these previous columns, check out "Evaluating a '72 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe" and "Restoring a '72 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe" at premierguitar.com.]

Once I'd checked the fretboard with a straightedge and radius gauge, I confirmed the guitar was ready for its new frets. After consulting with the client and referencing the original frets, we decided to go with Wide/Medium fretwire (item #149 at stewmac.com). This is slightly taller than the old Gibson jumbo wire, and its .046" crown provides ample height for a precision leveling after the frets are installed.

Preparation: For starters, I used a Japanese Fret Slot Cleaning Saw (#3616) to deepen any shallow slots in the fretboard, measuring the depth as I went with a Fret Slot Depth Gauge (#5435). I then used the Fret Slot Cleaning Tool (#4870) to remove old glue and debris so the new frets would seat correctly.

Tailoring: Over the years, I've occasionally chosen to bend each individual fret by hand before installing it, but typically I use the FretBender (#0345)—a time-saving tool that lets me accurately radius 24 inches of fretwire at a time. Once a strip of fretwire was radiused, I laid it across the fretboard slot, gauged the length I'd need, and cut it with a Fret Cutter (#0619). This Les Paul has neck binding, so I used a Fret Tang Nipper (#1626) to undercut the fret ends so they'd sit over the binding properly.

1. Cleaning out the fret slots before installing new fretwire. **2.** Pre-radiusing 24" of fretwire with a FretBender. **3.** Undercutting the fret ends so they'll sit over the neck binding. **4.** Setting the new frets. **5.** After the frets are installed, their ends are beveled and de-burred for a smooth feel. **6.** A close-up view of our ABR-1 Correct-o-matic. **7.** Using a revolving leather-hole punch to cut mahogany end-grain caps. **8.** Plugging old screw holes with punched mahogany caps.

Installation: A Deadblow Fretting Hammer (#1296) and brass Fret Setter (#1666) are my tools of choice for this task. As part of this process, I used StewMac #10 Thin Super Glue (#7001) glue to secure each fret in its slot.

Dressing: After the frets were installed, I used a Fret Beveling File (#3759) to put a uniform, 35-degree angle on all the fret ends, and then took off any burrs with a Fret End Dressing File (#1175). The next step was to give the Deluxe's new frets a full dress. When it comes to fret dressing, there are a variety of tools and procedures for leveling, crowning, and polishing fretwire. You'll find lots of information online, including reputable demonstrations on YouTube. If you're interested in this subject, my advice is to keep an open mind and really do some homework.

Bonus Trade Secrets: Before we wrap up this installment of the '72 Deluxe project, I thought I'd share a couple of trade secrets we used during this phase. As I mentioned in the September column, the guitar's original ABR-1 Tune-o-matic bridge had collapsed and was unusable. Over the years we've experimented with different jigs for correcting this problem, and we've now developed a system that's consistent and easy to use.

We call this device our ABR-1 Correct-o-matic, and it consists of two polyethylene plates mounted to a vise. The bottom plate is radiused, while the outer wings of the flat top plate have .015" shims added to create the desired pitch. The idea is to clamp the bridge and—in a very controlled way—bend it back into its original position by applying pressure to the vise. Once the bridge's underside is snug against the radiused polyethylene plate, the bridge is correctly arched and ready to come out. This process literally takes seconds.

My second trade secret comes from a farm-and-horse supply store. Such outlets sell a tool called a revolving leather-hole punch. It's designed to punch holes into leather straps of horse saddles, but we are using it to make mahogany end-grain caps. This punch lets you select multiple hole sizes—from 5/64" to 3/16". Very handy. As you can see in the photos, the tool works perfectly for capping unwanted screw holes in the Les Paul Deluxe.

Thank you for allowing me to share my world with you!

JOHN BROWN *is the inventor of the Fretted/Less bass. He owns and operates Brown's Guitar Factory, a guitar manufacturing, repair, and restoration facility staffed by a team of talented luthiers. His guitar-tool and accessory designs are used by builders all over the world. Visit brownsguitarfactory.com or email John at info@brownsguitarfactory.com.*

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LET'S MAKE A DEAL! BY KEVIN BORDEN

Whether by phone or email, I'm most frequently contacted with this question: "I have three basses sitting in front of me, and I'm trying to decide which one I'm going to buy. What's the best deal?" I usually can't answer this question for several reasons: One is due to liability, another is I don't know what's right for you, and finally—and this is crucial—I don't have the instruments in front of me, which makes it difficult to evaluate them properly.

To help you reach a decision the next time you're pondering a purchase, I've summarized three actual deals in which I assisted the potential buyer. I hope this information will help you if you find yourself in a similar position. You may have some money for a bass burning a hole in your pocket and you've found several to choose from. You need to ask yourself if this bass is going to be a player, a closet queen, or a financial asset. Once you answer this question, your decision usually gets whittled down. If it doesn't, that's where Uncle Kebo's Logic (aka UKL) comes in.

Deal One. My friend "Greg" called me and said, "Kev, I found three basses. I want all of them but I can only afford one." Greg is a fine player who uses everything, but it has to play and sound great. This is what he'd found: (1) A 1958 P bass with a body-only refin and all parts present, but it had a refret and a new case. (2) A 1965 sunburst P bass in exquisite condition, frighteningly clean, no excuses, and 100 percent original. (3) A 1971 P bass finished in Firemist Gold, in nice, but not great shape. Each bass was a buck away from $6000—valued somewhat properly in my opinion—but each needed to be looked at on its own merits.

The 1958 is my favorite Fender of all time and my personal number-one bass is a '58 P bass in beat-to-death condition. What this bass had going for it is that it was a '58, all the parts were original, and it played and sounded great. The body-only refinish job was done by one of the best and was artificially aged to match the patina and wear of the neck—so it looked great too. This was a "fool your friends" refin, but the negative was that it was still a refin.

The '65 was put under a bed when new and was so clean it glowed. All it needed was a level and dress of the frets for no other reason than it appeared to have been uplayed since 1965. We did not even need to open this bass up it was so honest, but the negative here was that the bass was really *too* clean to play—and Greg is a player.

The '71 was a tough one. On the plus side, it was an all-original bass in a super-rare color that also played fantastically well. The drawback here is that the bass was competing against P basses from the '50s and '60s for about the same money. Had the '71 been a sunburst, it would not have even been in the mix. So what to do?

The '71 was ruled out because unless you have the collection and needed the color, it just wasn't as good as the other two. However, Greg still had a big dilemma. The '65 was a relative bargain, but it would never be used. While the '58 was a fantastic bass, it was a refin and '58s are quite common.

In the end, Greg ended up with the '65. It was one of the cleanest basses I have ever seen. In fact, I may only have seen two basses ever from this era that were cleaner. The '65 was a once-in-a-lifetime find, and in my opinion, the price was light by about $3000. While the '58 was a deadly good bass and fairly priced, Greg had four other basses he could rely on. So Greg's closet has a new item.

This 1958 P bass sports an unusual combination of features: a three-tone sunburst finish, a one-piece maple neck (the rosewood P bass fretboard was introduced in '59), and anodized aluminum pickguard. Photo courtesy of Gruhn Guitars

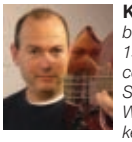
Deal Two. "A regular customer of mine, "Joe" was looking at two Gibson Thunderbirds. One was a nice '64 T-Bird IV and the other was a really nice '64 T-Bird II. The Bird IV was a sunburst and 100 percent original, but had a very mild headstock break, though the break was nicely repaired and would not be noticed by a casual glance. The price on the T-Bird IV was $7000. The Bird II was super clean (8.9 condition) with no excuses, no breaks, 100 percent original, and priced at $7250. I knew both basses and thought the T-Bird II was crazy good—better than 90 percent of the others I'd seen over the past five years. The T-Bird IV was nice, not great, and it was repaired. But if I was deciding between the two, I would have opted for the IV if it was priced $1000 lower. As it stood, it was a tough choice with no wrong answer. Ultimately, Joe opted for the T-Bird II and ended up paying $7000 for it.

Deal Three. This is a deal that involved none other than me. A few years back, I wanted a nice Ricky 4001 to use in a power-pop band I was with at the time. Almost immediately, three basses found their way to my computer. One was a crazy-clean '71 in Burgundyglo for $4000. The next was an original, fair-condition '68 in Fireglo for $9500. The third was a '67 Jetglo with some changed parts for $4500.

The '71 was a super-nice bass, but it was full priced and I knew I was going to use it—I did not want to make a player out of a collector bass. The '68 was intriguing: The bass was great and the price was right by a few grand, but I just didn't want to spend that type of money on a player bass. The '67 was also very intriguing because it was in my price range, it had newer, vintage 4003 pickups installed, newer tuners with extra holes, and a newer tailpiece. Essentially, the body and finish were real and everything else came off a 4001v63. It turns out that a prior owner swapped parts from the two basses and sold the '67 off as "real" to an unsuspecting customer (who later received a rude awakening).

So I had to choose between the '71 that was too nice and fully priced, the '68 that was a light bargain, but too expensive for my needs, and the '67—a nice bass with no real pedigree. I ended up buying the Jetglo '67 because the bass fit my needs *and* it fit my budget. It's a great player and did everything I needed it to do.

I hope these examples provide some useful perspectives you can use to solve your next bass-buying dilemma!



KEVIN BORDEN *has been playing bass since 1975. He is the principal and co-owner, with "Dr." Ben Sopranzetti, of Kebo's Bass Works (visit them online at kebosbassworks.com). You can reach Kevin at kebobass@yahoo.com. Feel free to call him KeBo.*

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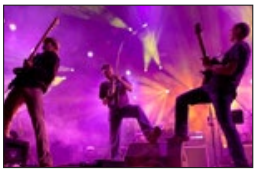

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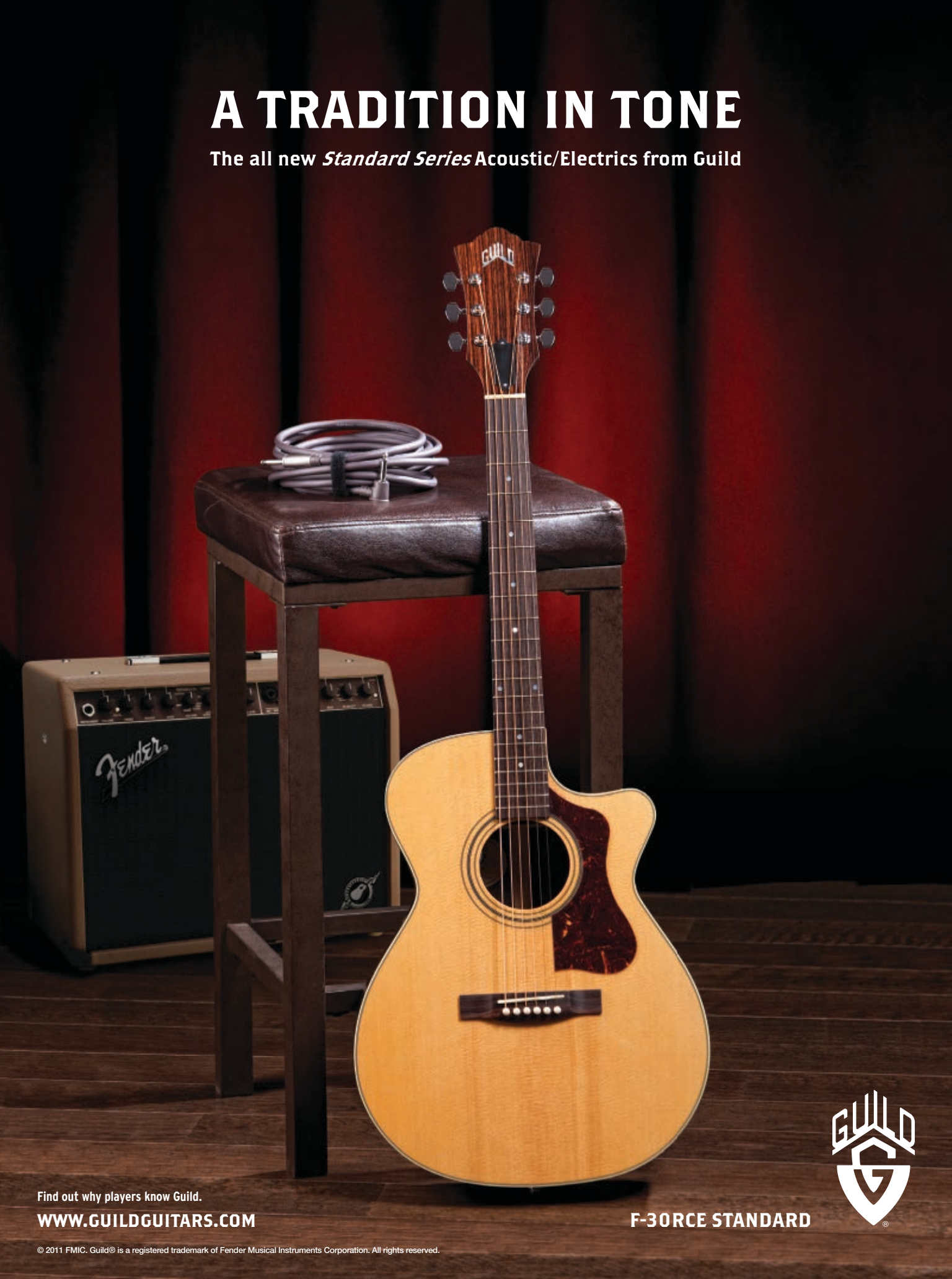

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The Fingerpicking Engine

BY RICHARD GILEWITZ

Once touted as one of the strangest men in acoustic music, fingerstyle guitarist Richard Gilewitz lives up to this depiction with his rousing performances filled with amazing chops, humor, and a history of the acoustic guitar from blues to folk, traditional to classical, and all points in between. For more information, visit richardgilewitz.com.

CHOPS: Intermediate
THEORY: Beginner
LESSON OVERVIEW:

- Develop basic right-hand finger independence
- Create accompaniment patterns using forward and backward rolls
- Learn your own fingerpicking system

To hear sound clips of these examples, head to premierguitar.com/nov2011

Fingerpicking, or fingerstyle guitar as it's commonly called, is basically plucking the strings with bare fingers, fingernails, and on occasion, with the aid of picks. I began fingerpicking early in my career and after throwing away my fingerpicks—once referred to by a colleague as my Freddy Krueger Starter Set—I found myself playing with more fluid movements and power. This came along with the discovery of my ability to create three-dimensional dynamic effects.

If you find yourself among the players who still lack a system for fingerpicking that prevents you from producing these sounds, perhaps your "fingerpicking engine" needs a tune-up. Is your tone production often weak? Do you use the same finger twice in a row to pluck the same string, creating not only a hiccup in the music, but also a tense feeling in your hands and the rest of your body? Then you have come to the right place.

As my students cultivate their own fingerpicking system, I try to convince them to first focus on themselves, then the music in front of them. I encourage them to tune into their breathing, their body postures, and any tension that might be building up in order to learn how to relax during the development of a piece or during an exercise. Only then, as they relax, can their entire attention be focused and devoted to learning. Even while they work extensively with a metronome at different speeds to develop a groove, I want them to remain calm and not stressed out.

Let's get on to revving up your fingerpicking engine. Your transmission is made up of a basic language of picking patterns with a positional system used to create group landing points, and most importantly, a borrowing system that eliminates using the same picking finger twice in a row.

Don't get me wrong. There are many times when I will use the same finger twice in a row, such as with a grouped finger vamp of sorts, frequently used in jazz, or if I am dealing with quarter- and eighth-notes where a finger substitution is not as urgent a requirement. But these moves are intentional, not accidental due to poor finger placement.

For a closer look at the language of the picking hand, visualize two different menus of choices, much like sitting down at your two favorite restaurants. One menu offers up arpeggio patterns, where a group of fingers pluck, following a single thumb strike. You can see an example of this with an Am chord in **Fig. 1** and an E chord in **Fig. 2**. Just a reminder, for all these examples we

Fig. 1

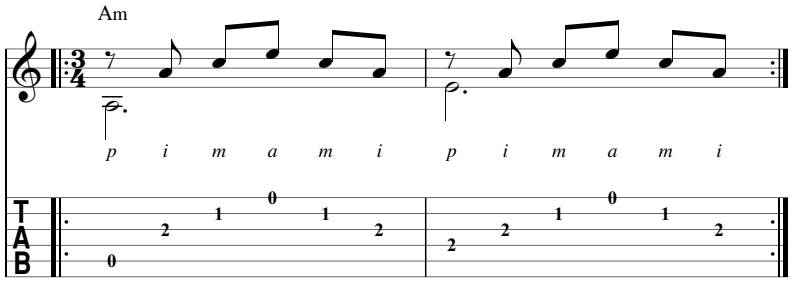


Fig. 2

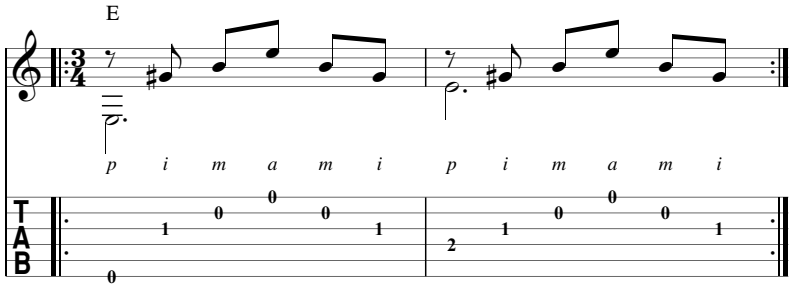
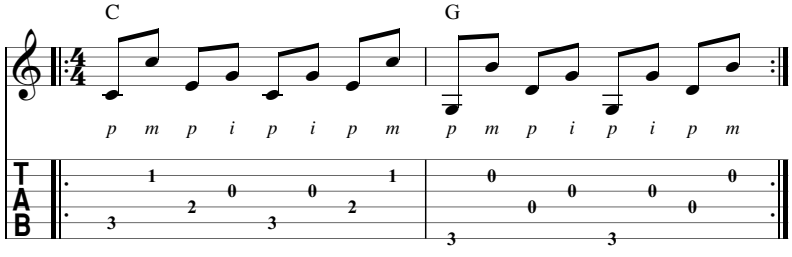


Fig. 3



are using the traditional *p–i–m–a* notation for the plucking hand where *p* is for the thumb, *i* is for index, *m* is for middle, and *a* is for the ring finger.

The other menu, which is slightly more expansive, consists of alternating bass patterns, including two types of rolls, pinch patterns, and pairings of fingers. In **Fig. 3**, we combine an inside roll with a forward roll. If you look at the first two beats of each measure, you can see how we pluck the 2nd and 5th strings before moving "inside" to hit the 4th and 3rd strings. In the second half of the measure we begin with the 5th and 3rd strings before moving "forward" onto the 4th and 2nd strings.

We begin to develop multiple patterns with multiple voices in **Fig. 4**. By using your *m* and *a* fingers for the melody, you are able to keep the upper voice ringing while *p* and *i* keep the accompaniment going. I call these "pinch" patterns because there is a pinching motion between your thumb and your middle or ring fingers. **Fig. 5** is a variation on the forward roll, but here we add an additional note in order to practice moving our fingers in specific groupings.

Once we have some basic patterns down, we can move on to different string sets with a position-based system that will keep your fingers in an orderly arrangement. Using a simple E chord, I have demonstrated the three positions in **Fig. 6**. In the first measure, we use *i–m–a* on strings 3–1. Think of this as position 1. We move that group of fingers to strings 4–2 in the second measure for position 2, and finally we shift to strings 5–3 for position 3. Try some arpeggios with these positions and practice moving between them.

Let's try some finger substitutions with the picking hand so you can begin to see when and where these opportunities arise. The most basic example I can think of, which appears in some fashion in nearly every tune I encounter, is shown in **Fig. 7**. Essentially, when you have two or more notes on the same string you can "borrow" a finger to help out. When I am moving from the 2nd string to the 1st string, I start with *m–i* and then use *a* on the 1st string. When going the other direction, I use *m–a*.

It's that simple. This exercise should demonstrate that each finger can stay close to its home base. Just to test the theory, try plucking with the same finger twice in a row, pick up speed, and watch, or better yet, *feel* what happens. This method can be done with any chord, on any groups of strings, in any tuning, and with any style of music.

When learning a new piece, I often refer to my approach as tapping, clapping, and mapping. It's a method of first tapping out the rhythms on a table using a metronome as my guide, then clapping the rhythm with my hands, and finally mapping out the intended choice of fingerings for both hands. Similar to programming a computer, my hands now seem to know what to do automatically. As you polish up your fingerpicking engine, always inspect each measure, one at a time, to make sure no details have been missed. That is what separates the good pickers from the great ones.

Fig. 4

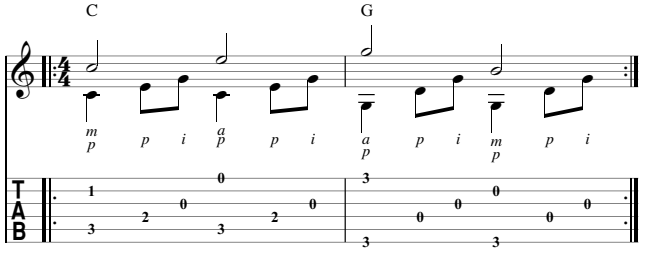


Fig. 5

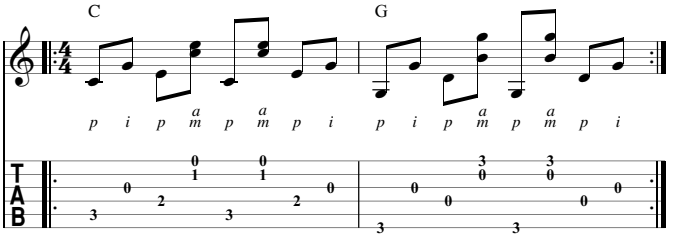


Fig. 6

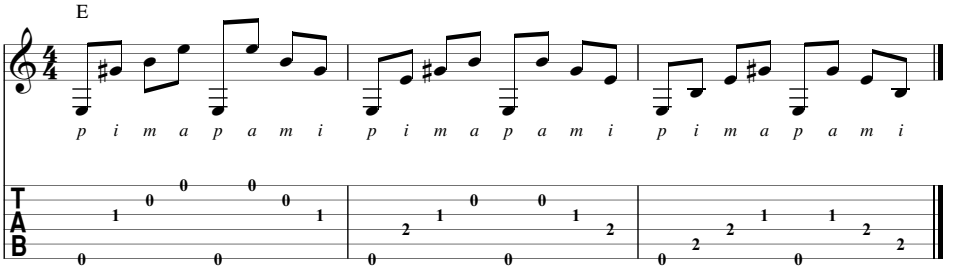
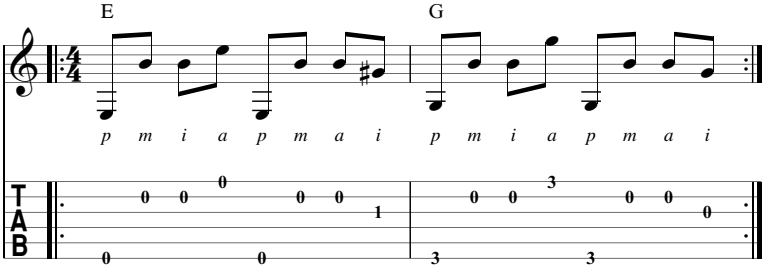


Fig. 7



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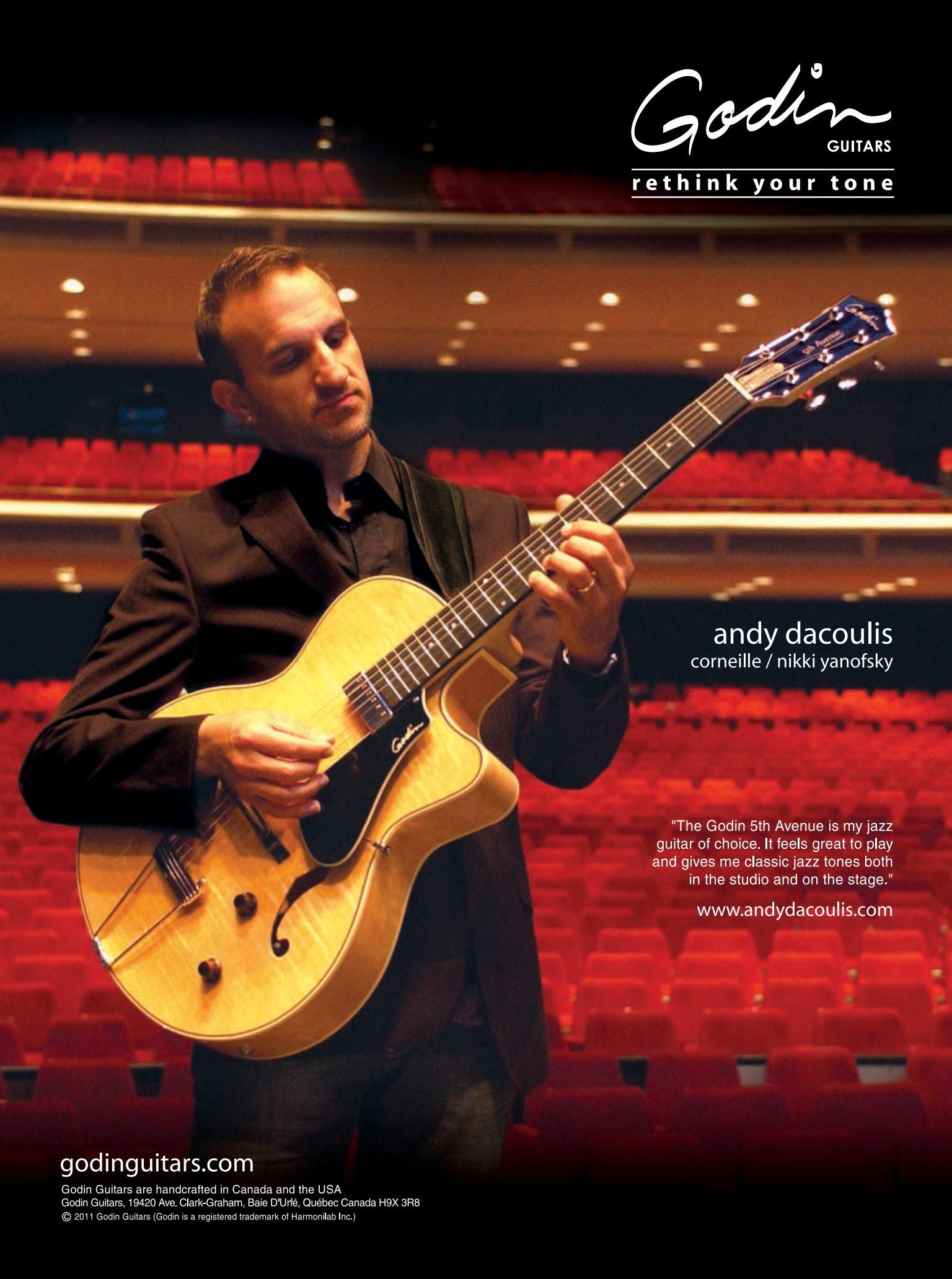
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Shapes on Strings

BY SCOTT TOURNET

Scott Tournet is the lead guitarist in Grace Potter & the Nocturnals. His top five recording artists are Jimi Hendrix, Neil Young, Led Zeppelin, the Stax house band, and Wilco. Attending a Phish concert in '96 changed his life, and he has never looked back. For more information, visit gracepotter.com.

CHOPS: Beginner
THEORY: Advanced Beginner
LESSON OVERVIEW:

- Explore the sound of open-G tuning
- Learn how to break out of the rut of standard tuning
- Create I–IV–V progressions using basic chord shapes in open G

Click here to hear sound clips of these examples.

Do you ever feel boxed in by standard tuning? You start writing a song, but it keeps sounding like something that's already been written. I think most of us can fall into that rut sometimes. The best way I've found to avoid that rut is to change things up. There are lots of ways to trick your brain into looking at music—and the guitar—in a new light to keep you inspired and working hard. Playing other instruments, studying different styles and genres, purposely breaking rules, and practicing with cool drumbeats are some fun ways to keep it fresh. One method that almost always seems to work for me though, is using an open tuning. In some ways it seems like the guitar was designed for this. I've even had guitars that sound terrible in standard tuning that suddenly sound amazing, once I found the right open tuning. In addition to expanding your musicality, an open tuning is a great way to use a mediocre guitar you might have lying around.

Open G is the first open tuning I started with, and many people know it as the tuning Keith Richards made famous. Though I've since learned many Stones riffs, I first discovered open G in a more melodic way thanks to the acoustic tracks on *Led Zeppelin III*. I soon found out that Muddy Waters, Mississippi Fred McDowell, R.L. Burnside, and plenty of other Delta blues guitarists had been making open G sound pretty and dirty long before rock 'n' roll even existed. I then stumbled into Zeppelin's version of "In My Time of Dying," as well as ZZ Top, Little Feat's Lowell George (who actually tuned up a whole-step to open A), and many others.

Although there are lots of different directions you can take open tunings, I've always thought about them more in terms of light and dark. Or for the more scientific minded, major and minor.

Let's get started by tuning our guitars. Tune your 6th string down a whole-step to D, your 5th string down a whole-step to G (because it's the root, this open 5th string often gets used as a drone string), and finally, drop your 1st string down a whole-step to D. You're now in open G, which is D–G–D–G–B–D (low to high).

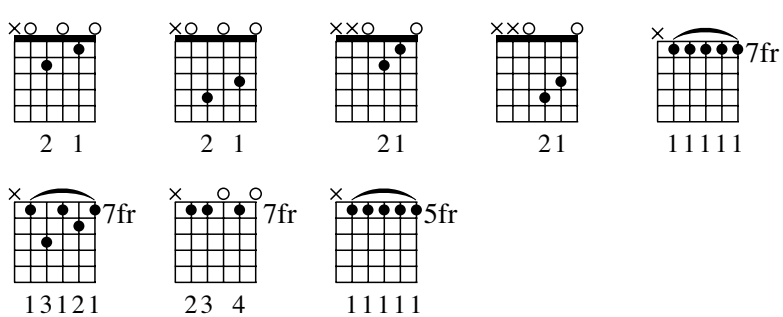
Before we get into the examples, I should mention that while I definitely played along with albums and learned some riffs here and there, that's not really the way I learned these tunings. Searching and discovering fresh voicings on my own really helped me get inside the sound of this new musical landscape. One of my favorite things to do is to drone the 5th string and just go off on different scales and chords to find how many ways you make the root note (G) feel different. It's fun to play some more exotic scales, dyads, and triads against the droning root note. Obviously, it's great to learn other people's riffs, but don't forget to take some time to see where your own instincts will lead you without intellectual interference.

In **Fig. 1**, you can see a few of my favorite go-to chord shapes in open G. Put them all together, and you'll get the feel of a '70s Rolling Stones ballad. Most of the chords have an open-G string in them, which helps everything feel and sound connected. Learning the chords from this figure is really the most important part. Once you learn them, try to rearrange them into a new riff or song.

These chords will get you started, but if you are serious about adding open tunings to your arsenal, this is really just the beginning. Yes, you can figure out all the chords and scales you'll need fairly quickly if you know your theory, but getting the touch and feel needed to translate these notes and chords into music comes with repetition, time, and heart.

Do you know how, when you get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, you can feel your way there by running your hands against the walls? Or maybe when you were a kid, there was a trail in the woods you rode your bike down so many times that you could fly down it and know where all the rocks and logs were? You just do these things so many times over that you can do them without thinking. The same goes for practicing guitar. When it's time to perform, you can free your mind up to deal with the million other things it has to deal with. Like how some guy spilled beer on your pedalboard, or the bass player is missing the changes because he's looking at girls, or the drummer's drunk, or that your vintage tube amp is on fire. You get the drift, so hang in there and keep having fun.

Fig. 1



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Phrasing: A Lost Art

Photo by Jimmy Katz

BY COREY CHRISTIANSEN

Corey Christiansen, a former senior editor and guitar clinician for Mel Bay Publications, is known for his fluid jazz improvisation and instructional chops. He teaches full-time at Utah State University and is an Artist-in-Residence at the Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana, the Atlanta Institute of Music, and the Broadway Music School. To learn more about his CDs and DVD, and see his current workshop and performance schedule, visit coreychristiansen.com.

CHOPS: Intermediate
THEORY: Advanced Beginner
LESSON OVERVIEW:

- Learn to become accountable for your phrasing
- Create improvised lines that outline the changes
- Develop an understanding of phrase structures in the blues

Click here to hear sound clips of these examples.

Phrasing: When it comes to an improvised solo, it's pretty much what separates the good players from the greats. It's the difference between a solo that sounds like a composition and a solo that sounds like the fingers are just randomly falling down on the strings.

So what's the trick to phrasing? Well the definitive answer is colossal, so let's start off by just dealing with the basics. The first thing you have to understand is the phrase structure (the number of measures in each phrase) of the music you are playing. In this case, we're talking about the blues and more specifically a 12-bar blues. There are three four-bar phrases in a 12-bar blues. Most popular music is built on phrases that contain an even number of measures, with four- and eight-measure phrases being the most common.

Singers generally understand the phrase structure of the blues better than the average soloist, so let's look to them for some lessons. In **Fig. 1**, you can see a lyric over a blues form that demonstrates a typical phrasing structure. It's very easy to see that the lyric sung in the second line is identical to the lyric in the first. Typically, the melody would also be very close, if not the same, especially if the melody was using notes out of the blues scale, which we know works for all the chord changes in the blues. The lyric for the third is the summary of the first and second phrases. Notice the use of space in measures three and four of the first phrase. This is a very important part of the blues. The space at the end of a phrase lets you digest what you have played, allows other members of the group to react and respond to your playing, and it gives you some time to set up your ideas for the next phrase.

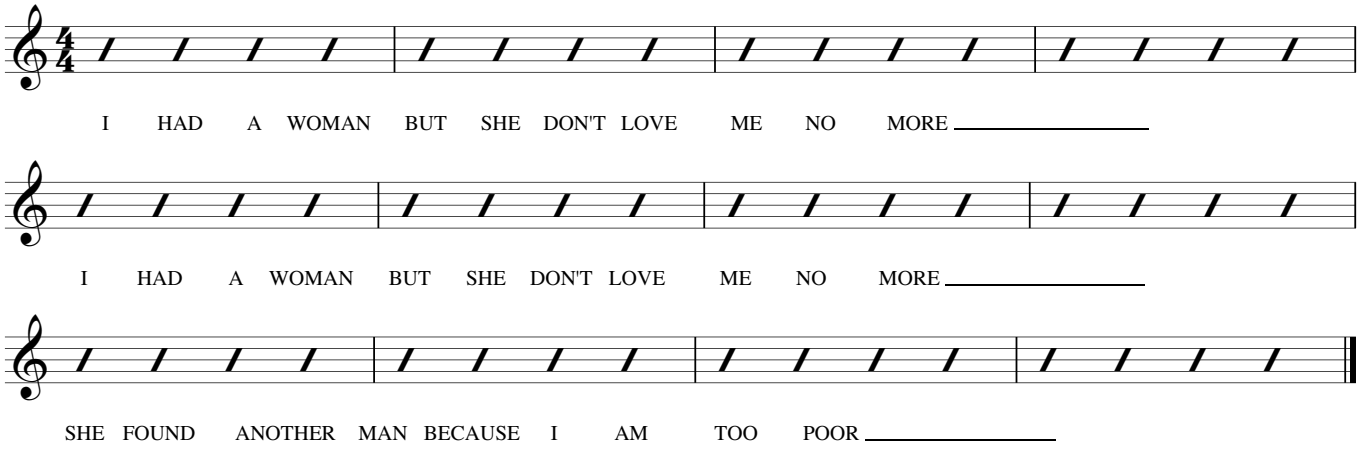
What we are going to try to do now is use the same technique, but replace the lyric and song melody with an improvised melody. This is harder than it might seem, because as the soloist, you have to remember and be accountable for the melodic material you play in the first phrase so you can repeat verbatim it in the second.

We will start out with some simple ideas that are generated from the blues scale and graduate to ideas that use a melody we'll manipulate to follow the chord changes. Even though this is a simple concept, many advanced players have a hard time accounting for what they have played. If you can't account for what you've played, you are subjecting yourself to an out-of-control solo that, frankly, will be devoid of strong phrasing.

If you can't account for what you've played, you are subjecting yourself to an out-of-control solo that, frankly, will be devoid of strong phrasing.

In **Fig. 2** you can see an example of putting this phrasing to use in a melodic way. I'm intentionally keeping the examples pretty easy. This concept is the classic

Fig. 1



situation of "It's really easy to talk about it and understand it, but it's hard to actually execute with integrity." When you practice this, be very honest with yourself if you are remembering *exactly* what you played in the first phrase and playing it *exactly* the same in the second phrase. The third phrase gives you the opportunity to play whatever you want to summarize.

I'm keeping all the notes for this example within the A minor pentatonic scale, so our repeated melody won't clash with any of the chords.

The next step, shown in **Fig. 3**, is to take a phrase that outlines the changes and keeps the integrity of the line by altering the line's notes to match the chord changes in the blues.

As I said earlier, this is an easy concept to talk about, but it's a tricky concept to perfect. Players gain control by being accountable, and this concept makes you accountable for every note and every rhythm played. As you practice, pay attention to the details. It's easy to say you have something down when in reality, you don't. Be honest in your practicing.

Fig. 2

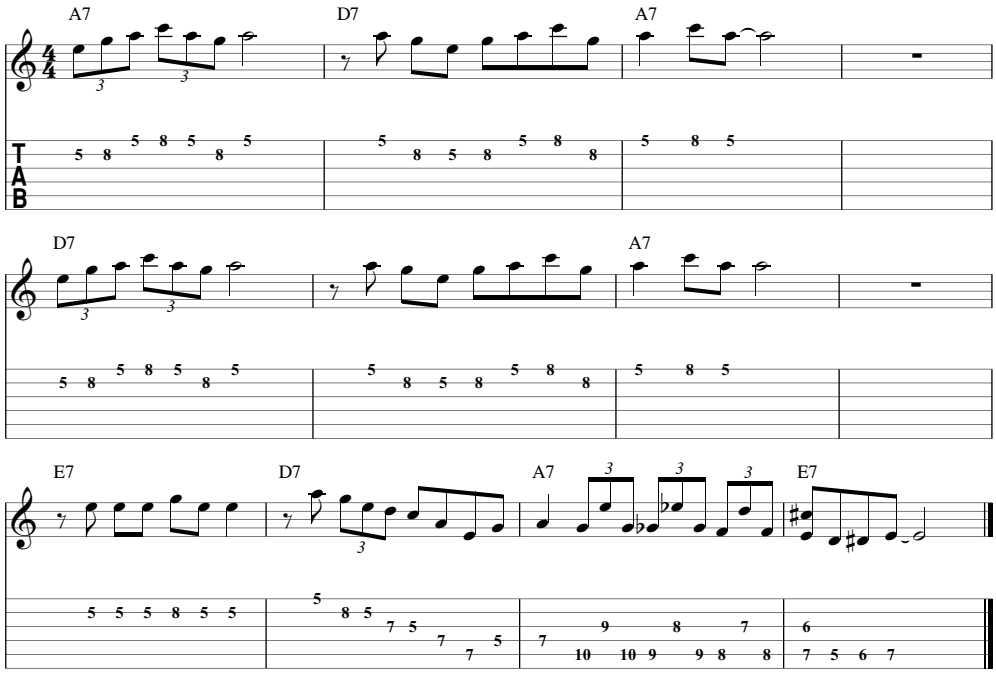
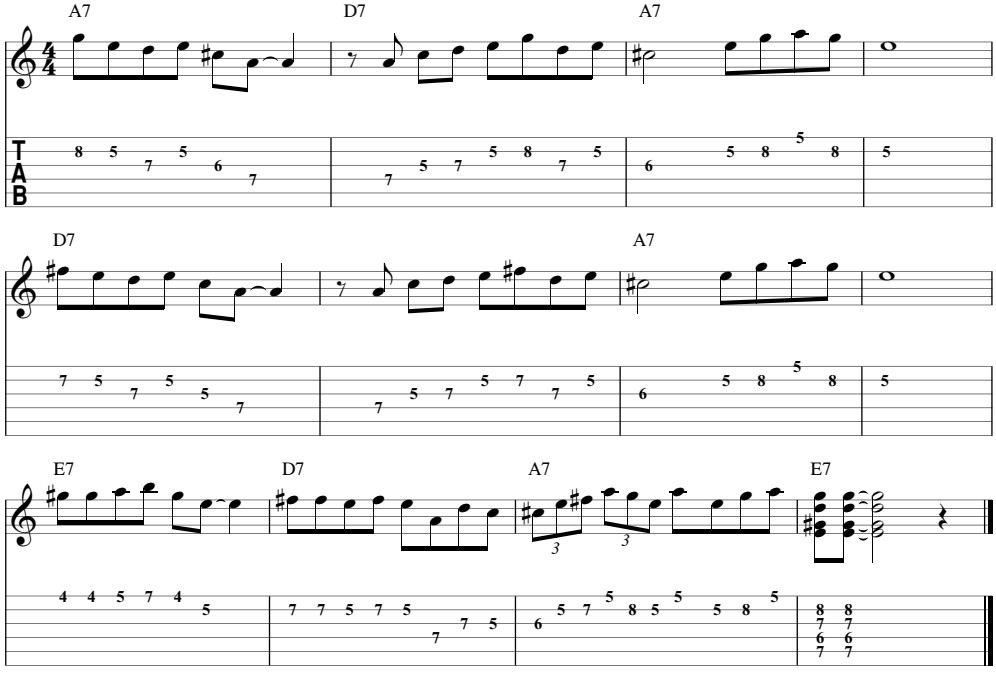


Fig. 3

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Stranglehold by Starlight

BY PAUL GILBERT

Paul Gilbert purposefully began playing guitar at age 9, formed the guitar-driven bands Racer X and Mr. Big, and then accidentally had a No. 1 hit with an acoustic song called "To Be with You." Paul began teaching at GIT at the age of 18, has released countless albums and guitar instructional DVDs, and will be remembered as "the guy who got the drill stuck in his hair." For more information, visit paulgilbert.com

CHOPS: Intermediate
THEORY: Beginner
LESSON OVERVIEW:

- Learn to control the almighty fire-breathing beast that is distortion
- Discover the secret behind the sound of Godzilla brushing his teeth
- Develop the ability to think 44 times faster while improvising

Click here to hear sound clips of these examples.

I just listened to the guitar solo in Ted Nugent's "Stranglehold" with the intent of discovering one important thing. I wanted to know how long the solo stays in one key before changing to another key. The answer is two minutes and 56 seconds of grand and grinning A Dorian before the song finally shifts to an A Mixolydian melody, followed by some howling Byrdland feedback. I just want to ponder that number one more time ... 2:56. All spent in a single key center. Right on!

Then, I listened to the jazz standard "Stella by Starlight" with the same intentions. There are many versions of this popular tune and after listening to several of them, I would estimate that on average there a four seconds between each key change.

Now let's do the math: "Stranglehold" (the solo) stays in one key for 176 seconds. "Stella by Starlight" stays in one key for four seconds. When it comes to improvising, "Stella" requires the soloist to think… not twice as fast, not 10 times as fast, but *44* times faster than when navigating through "Stranglehold."

This is why playing over jazz chord changes can be one of the most humiliating experiences a rock guitar player can ever face. I know. I've tried it. It's horrible. Just horrible! (Not the music, but my ability to play it.)

There are two things that I want to scream out when I'm butchering a jazz standard. The first is, "I'm not *ready* to change yet!" Basically, I've never had to deal with my whole harmonic universe shifting every four seconds. It doesn't give me a chance to even get started. I haven't unpacked my bags, or even taken my shoes off. I haven't had a chance to look around. I'm not ready to leave yet! My second impulse is to scream, "I don't know what happened, normally I can play!" Suddenly, all my Ted Nugent licks don't work anymore and that is *deeply* unsettling. It fills me with an uncontrollable desire to apologize.

Is this proof that all rock guitarists are dummies and all jazz guitar players are geniuses? It sure feels that way, when all those chords toss me around. In defense of myself and of my rock 'n' roll brethren, I have to say this: What we may lack in "wild key center-hopping abilities," we make up for with "things that can't easily be written down" and "controlling that fire-breathing monster we call distortion."

Before I go further, I should say that I really like the sound of traditional jazz. When I hear a mellow hollowbody guitar with squeak-free and unbendable flatwound strings, the guitar's tone control all the way down, and then plugged into a super clean, solid-state amp, it's like a sonic massage. The music is beautiful. The atmosphere is sophisticated and attractive. I wouldn't change it one bit.

I also believe that this kind of jazz setup prevents many of the problems that rock guitar players have to deal with. It's quite possible that the typical clean jazz tone is 44 times less distorted than the average fire-breathing guitar rig.

This means that jazz guitarists can funnel all their brain and finger power into steering through those winding roads of harmony. The jazz player is not distracted by the obligations that distortion requires. The rock player, on the other hand, has to reserve significant brain and finger power just to harness the wild beast that comes alive when the distortion is cranked up.

I must admit that when I see a rock guitar player strap on an instrument, the first thought that enters my head is worry. I'm worried that it's going to be noisy. Distortion magnifies the sound of every tiny hand movement in the same way that the typical jazz sound can mask them. Have you ever heard the Van Halen song, "Atomic Punk?" Eddie Van Halen plays the intro just by rubbing the side of his hand across the strings with lots of distortion and a phase shifter on. It sounds like Godzilla brushing his teeth! (I heartily approve.) If you tried the same technique with a clean jazz sound, you'd barely hear anything. Godzilla and his toothbrush would fade into the flapping wings of a butterfly. Done right, distortion brings unique sounds and excitement. But in inexperienced hands, it can be a big loud mess.

Let's look deeper into the nature of this fire-breathing rock guitar sound. I'd like to use painting as an analogy. With distortion, every tiny brushstroke is enlarged to a billboard-sized font, with all the details intact. There is your technique, with no clothes on, projected on a giant screen. If your technique is in good shape, you'll be proud to have it projected. But if it has some flaws or uncontrolled areas, you may crave the relative safety of those mellow muffled flatwounds. But don't give up too easily. Let's look at some specifics for taming the issues of distortion.

First and foremost is string noise. Possibly the biggest challenge to making a distorted guitar sound good (not noisy) is merely playing one note while simultaneously keeping the other five strings from scratching, grumbling, muttering, or just plain-old ringing out. With a jazzy sound, this is nearly a non-issue. With a rock sound, this string-controlling technique is vital.

This is where we come to the "things that can't be easily written down" part. Can you imagine what a score would look like if you had to specifically notate all the muting

required to control the unplayed strings? For every note played, the other five strings must be muted every time you play a new note! And the muting doesn't come from one simple source. You can use the palm of your picking hand, the pick itself, the tips of your fretting fingers, the front side of your fretting fingers, your thumb, or even just turn off your distortion box at a precise moment. Most of these techniques utilize small, specific physical motions that are barely visible, but again, are vital.

Of course, no one notates this sort of thing when writing out sheet music. It would be painstaking to write and cumbersome to read. But in the real world of playing rock guitar, it has to be done!

Imagine if a drummer had to do this. If every time drummers hit their snare, they had to lightly hold every other drum on their kit to keep them from making an unwanted racket. Only octopi could be drummers! Or think of the piano. In order to play a single, clear note, pianists would have to stretch out their arms in both directions to cover and control the other 87 notes! The sensitivity and feedback potential that rock guitar players use (to their advantage) would make many other instruments simply uncontrollable or impossible to play. This is why I feel that the art of playing a distorted electric guitar should not be underestimated. Distortion exaggerates the potential for beauty or ugliness, and it's purely up to the guitarist to steer the sound one way or the other. This is one of the things I love most about the electric guitar. It may have dangerous risks, but the sonic rewards for getting it right are glorious.

And then there's vibrato. Again, those jazzy flatwounds tend to keep things on the safe side. In fact, they are barely bendable, while slinky roundwound strings open up a whole world of vibrato possibilities. The whammy bar and the slide are other variations on this fantastic theme. Like before, the subtleties that separate the beautiful from the noisy are nearly impossible to notate on a written page. You can show "where" the vibrato should happen, but it would be impractical to notate "how." And the "how" is everything! If you listen to one note from B.B. King or Brian May, you can immediately tell who is who, just by their vibrato. I love them both, but I can't imagine how to write down the difference in a way that could be quickly and easily read.

I must admit that when I see a rock guitar player strap on an instrument, the first thought that enters my head is worry. I'm worried that it's going to be noisy.

There's more: Rock guitar players gain expression by sliding in and out of notes, using different pick angles to squeeze out pick harmonics and manipulate different attack textures, using pick scratches and other percussive sounds, and controlling harmonic feedback.

What is my conclusion from all this? First of all, if the most important stylistic ingredients of rock guitar can't be realistically notated or perceived visually, this leaves us to use THE EARS. Written music certainly communicates something (notes and rhythms) that forms the skeleton of music. Your ears will give the music its body and soul, and bring it to life. Rock music may be relatively simple harmonically, but the performances are as deep as the human spirit. In the vast majority of great recordings and performances, no one had any charts in front of them. It was all by ear.

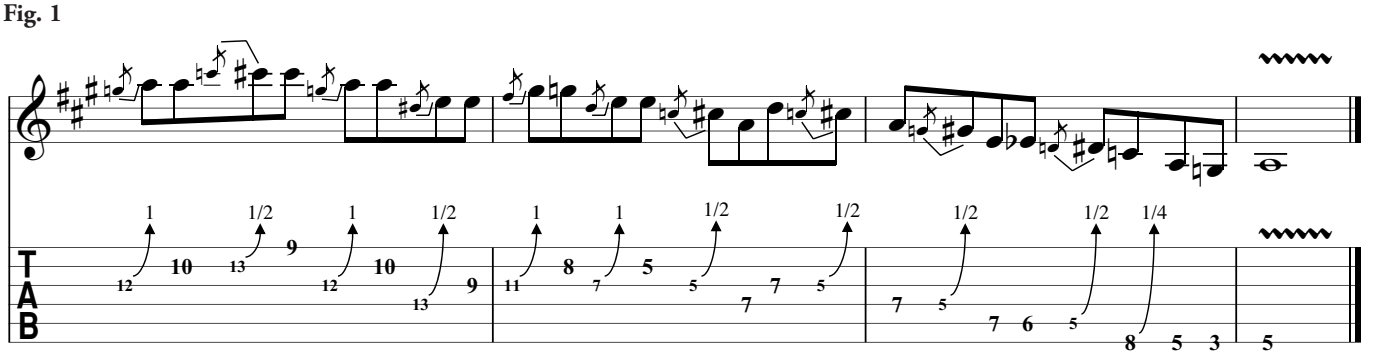
My second conclusion is that I am thankful that there are different styles of music, each with something that can inspire. All musicians have their comfort zone, and the trick for each of us is to venture out of it enough to get new ideas and inspiration, but not so much that your self-worth is crushed like a peanut under an elephant's toe.

Damn you, "Stella by Starlight." I'll get you someday.

P.S. What? No musical example this month? Okay, one quick one. I'll give you the written skeleton in **Fig. 1**.

The secret here is that nearly half of these notes can be bent. Your job is to insert those bends and bring it to life. (Please check out the audio file in the online version of this column. I'll play both the bent and unbent version so you can hear the difference.) Rock 'n' roll!

Fig. 1



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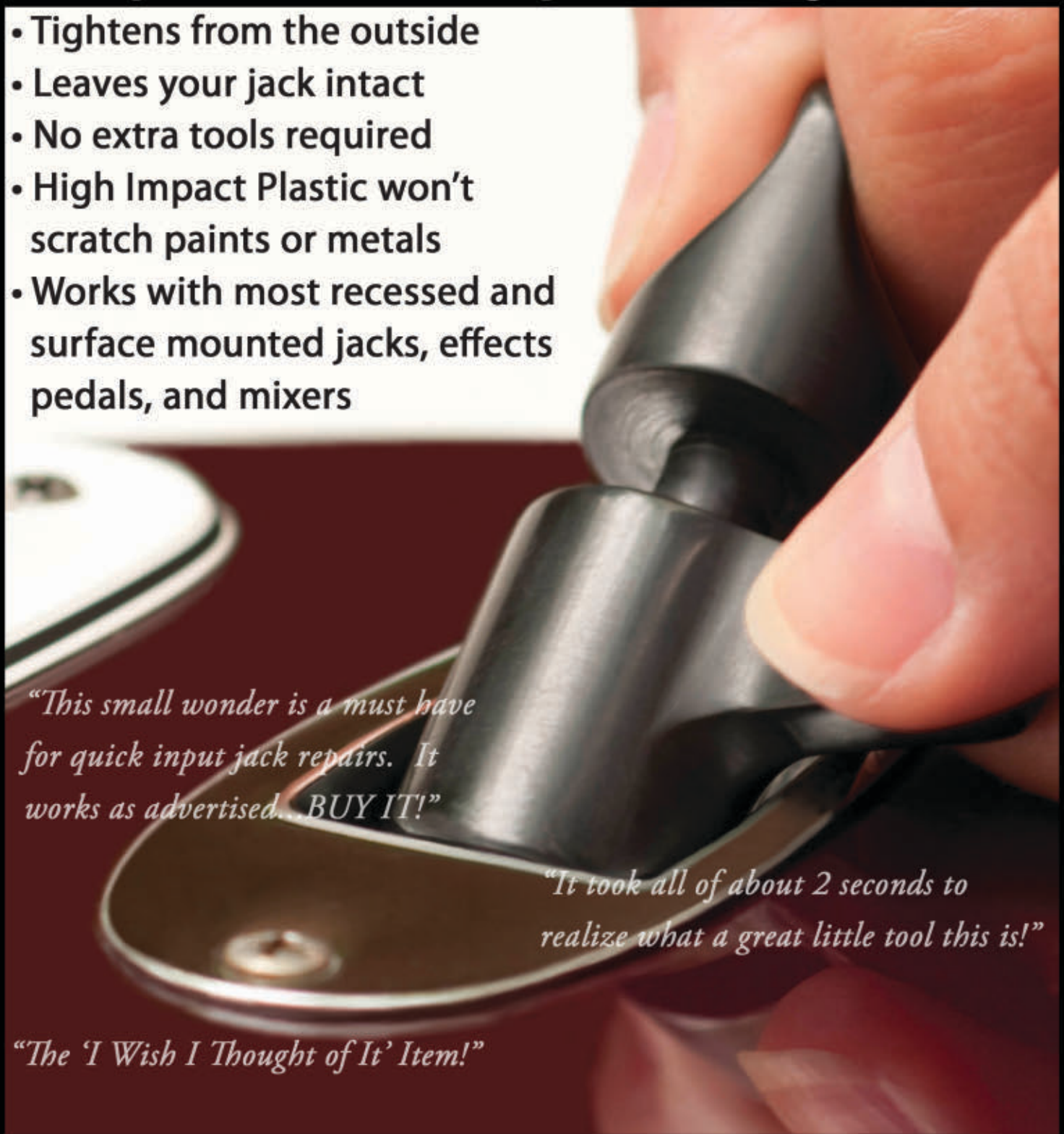

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Picking on the Ring Finger

BY ANDY ELLIS

A veteran guitar journalist and senior editor at PG, Andy is based in Nashville, where he backs singer-songwriters on the baritone guitar. He also hosts The Guitar Show, a weekly on-air and online broadcast. For the schedule and links to audio streams and archived audio interviews with inspiring players, visit theguitarshow.com.

CHOPS: Intermediate
THEORY: Intermediate
LESSON OVERVIEW:

- Develop a four-finger picking technique.
- Strengthen your picking-hand ring finger.
- Master a basic tremolo.

Click here to hear sound clips of these examples.

This month we begin a series of lessons that focus on developing fingerstyle chops. Whether you're comping jazzy harmony, plucking snappy blues riffs, creating harp-like runs by alternating open strings and fretted notes, wailing on slide guitar, frailing modal licks over drone strings, thumping out Travis-style alternating bass, or adding sparkle to your chordal passages with artificial harmonics, having a strong fingerpicking technique opens the door to a world of sounds and textures you simply can't get using only a flatpick.

In the fingerstyle world, variations in hand position and wrist angle abound, and in this series we'll look at some of the essential techniques and discuss how they work and when they're most appropriate. And everything we cover will apply to both acoustic and electric guitar, so you'll get maximum mileage from your efforts. Ready to roll up your sleeves and get to work? Cool, let's go!

Many fingerstyle guitarists have created powerful and enduring music using only their picking-hand thumb, index, and middle fingers. This is especially true of steel-string players: Traditional country and folk blues, old-school ragtime, and Travis-style thumbpicking are some examples of genres that rely on a three-finger technique. If you have any doubts as to just how far you can take this approach, just listen to a hot Scruggs-style banjo player, Dobro picker, or pedal-steel guitarist. Typically, they'll all be using a three-digit attack.

However, classical and flamenco guitarists have always used a four-finger picking technique—thumb, index, middle, and ring—and this allows them to approach the guitar as a miniature orchestra. A four-finger attack is essential to nylon-string Brazilian guitar, as well. Laurindo Almeida, Oscar Castro-Neves, Baden Powell, and Charlie Byrd are among those who merged the supple rhythms and wistful harmonies of Antônio Carlos Jobim and João Gilberto with a rigorous classical technique. (For an in-depth look at classical right-hand technique, go to premierguitar.com and check out "Classical Nitro," our interview with Matt Palmer in the October 2011 issue.)

But the four-finger technique has not been the exclusive property of nylon-string players. In an effort to make the steel-string electric sound more like a piano, such fingerstyle jazz-guitar wizards as George Van Eps, Jimmy Wyble, Ted Greene, Lenny Breau, Martin Taylor, and Tuck Andress have all embraced the four-digit approach. And let's not forget Chet Atkins: By adding the ring finger to Merle Travis' steamroller technique, he created an entire genre of "thumbpick" guitar that's equal parts country, pop, and jazz.

If you want to develop orchestral fingerstyle chops—which you can apply to rock, jazz, country, and blues—it's essential to gain control of your picking-hand ring finger, the weakling of the bunch. So we'll begin our odyssey by playing pattern-based arpeggios that include the ring finger and require it to perform alongside its stronger siblings. **Fig. 1** shows a simple bluesy figure based on an E7 arpeggio. Don't freak out over the waves of 16th-notes—just play this passage very slowly and it will sound great.

Fig. 1

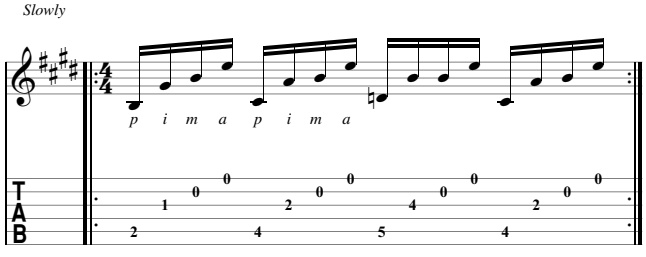
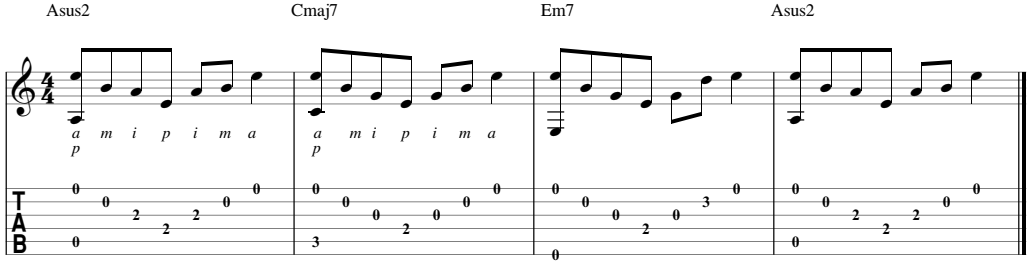


Fig. 2



You'll notice *p–i–m–a* markings in the music. These are abbreviations used by classical guitarists to indicate picking-hand fingering. The letters come from the Spanish words for thumb (*pulgar*), index (*indice*), middle (*medio*), and ring (*anular*) fingers. When practicing the exercises in this lesson, it's important to adhere to these notated fingerings.

For variety, develop your own drills using ascending *p–i–m–a* arpeggios. Keep the fretting-hand part simple and listen carefully to the volume of each note. Strive for an even, ringing sound with a uniform attack on each string.

The next step is to incorporate descending arpeggios into the mix, as in **Fig. 2**. We also break up the rhythm just a bit, add an alternating bass, and—this is an important move—introduce a squeeze between the thumb and ring finger, which happens on the downbeat of each measure. Again, watch the *p–i–m–a* markings and also check out the subtle B to D move on the 2nd string in measure 3 (Em7). After several passes through this phrase, craft a few variations of your own, using a similar descending and ascending picking pattern that incorporates a *p–a* squeeze and an alternating *p* bass.

So far, our well-mannered examples have used rhythmic patterns that repeat in every measure. Sometimes fingerpicking is like that—a pattern cycles again and again. But fortunately, music isn't always that tidy. When rhythms vary, you need to have enough control over your fingers that they'll respond to your commands. **Fig. 3** is designed to break up any predictable patterns, so your fingers can't fall back on muscle memory to execute each measure. Such "freestyle" fingerpicking takes practice, but can yield big dividends in your music. As with the previous examples, once you've got the hang of this, develop similar exercises of your own.

Now that all four fingers are warmed up, it's time to tackle a basic tremolo exercise. In **Fig. 4**, the ring, middle, and index fingers play three notes against each quarter-note thumbstroke. Here we have a descending bass line against the rippling melody, but you can also flip this passage around and ascend on the bass. Try it.

Next month, we'll look at another aspect of fingerstyle technique—developing *fretting-finger* independence. See you then.

Assume the Position

Photo by Sandy Mueller

We'll explore various picking-hand techniques with photos in upcoming lessons, but to get you started, here's a fundamental playing position adapted from classical guitar. Begin by simultaneously resting your thumb and three fingertips on the top four strings. Press in a little to feel the resistance of the strings against your digits. As you look down on your fingers, gently slide them back and forth along the strings until you see an "X" formed by your thumb and index finger. This picking "grip" allows your thumb to swing freely as you play downstrokes, and keeps it from getting entangled with your fingers as they pluck upward toward your palm.

Now, check your wrist. It should be relaxed and arched just enough to allow your forearm muscles to engage with those in the top of your hand. If your wrist is dropped too low, you limit most of the picking motion to your hand and finger muscles. If your wrist is too arched or turned severely to one side or the other, you tense up and lose power and dexterity. The goal is to have everything from your elbow to your fingertips working as one integrated system that's loose and limber.

Fig. 3

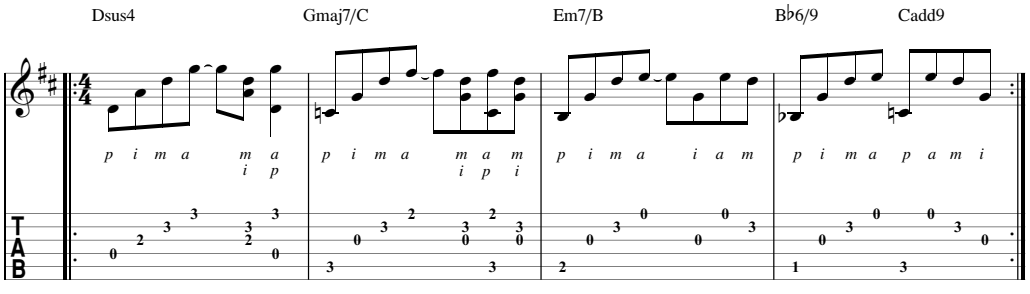
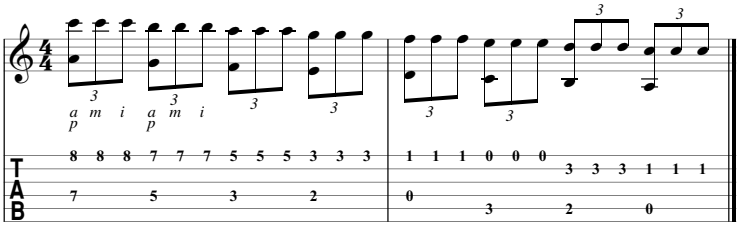
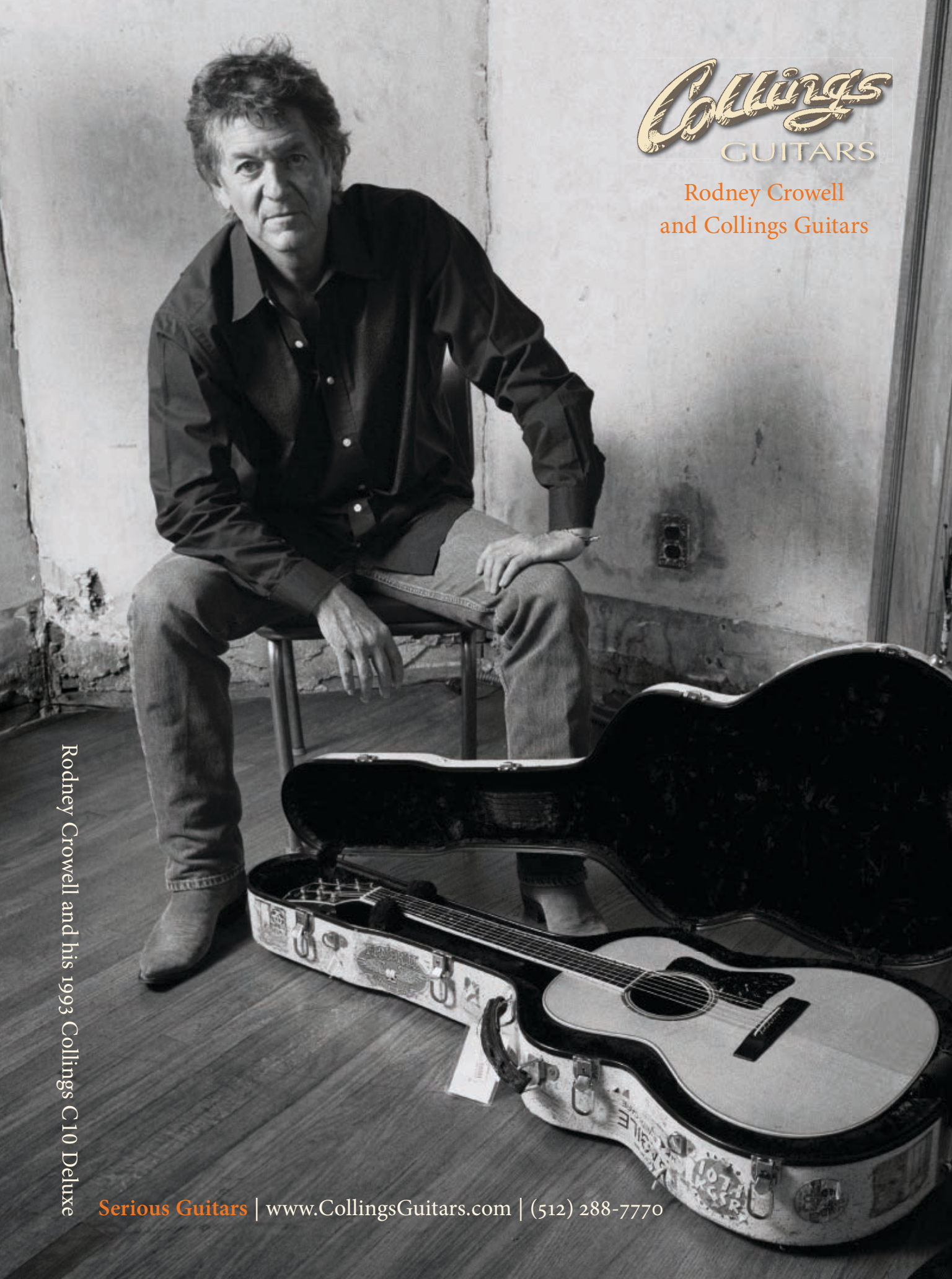


Fig. 4

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TONEWOODS

Once you know the right body shape, you'll want to choose your wood pairings, which add different sonic "flavors" to the shape's fundamental voice. You'll want to tune in to the tonal character of each type of wood, including the levels of bass, midrange and treble, along with acoustic properties like projection, sustain, overtones and headroom. A good test-driving approach is to play several guitars that have the same body style but different woods. This should help you differentiate how each responds to your playing techniques.

Among the most popular tonewoods are Indian rosewood and mahogany. Rosewood boasts a broad tonal spectrum, with a full low end and sizzling highs. Mahogany is known for a "meaty" or "breathy" midrange that comes from harmonic overtones that create a nice midrange "bloom." Maple has a bright, focused tone that projects well and cuts through a mix, making it a go-to choice for stage and studio players. A dense tropical hardwood like Hawaiian koa blends the midrange of mahogany with the top end of maple, and with extended play, the midrange gets sweeter and richer. Ovangkol, an African relative of rosewood, blends many of rosewood's tonal properties with a splash of extra midrange.

For guitar tops, spruce responds well to a broad range of playing styles, while cedar's extra warmth will appeal to many fingerstyle players and those with a light to medium attack.

YOUR PLAYING STYLE

In the end, a guitar should complement your natural playing style. Whether you're a seasoned pro or a beginner, understanding what kind of player you are (or want to be) will help you find your fit. Do you strum, flatpick, fingerpick, or all of the above? Do you have a heavy or light attack? What will your playing application(s) be? Will you be playing on your own or with other people? If you plan to sing and play, does the sound of a certain guitar better complement your voice? Knowing your "player profile" will make it easier to match up with the right guitar.

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

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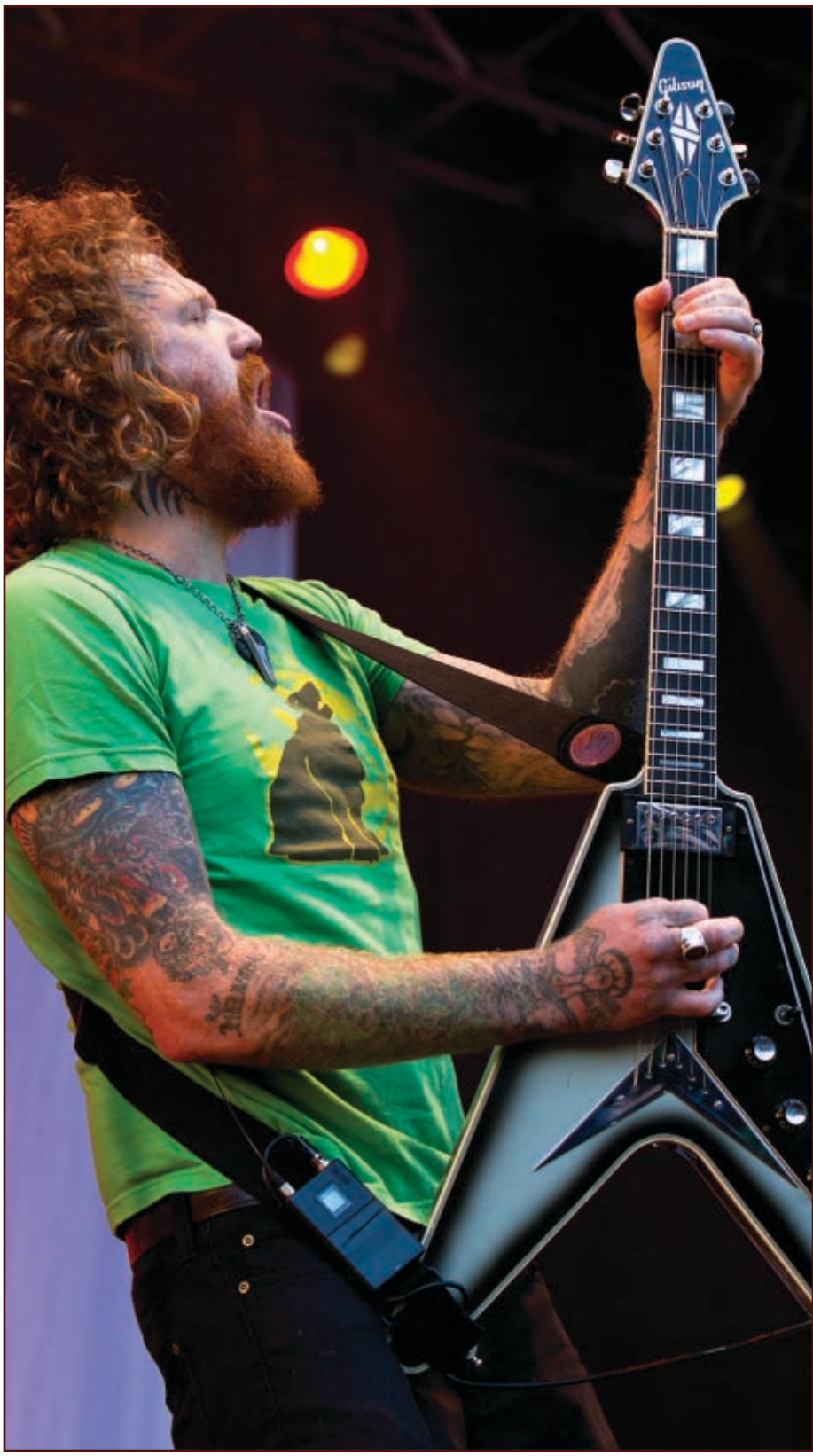


LEFT: Bill Kelliher onstage with one of his Gibson Explorers at a June 2011 gig at the Patronaat in Haarlem, Netherlands. Photo by Cindy Frey **RIGHT:** Brent Hinds with his silverburst Gibson Flying V at a June 2011 Mastodon appearance at the Norwegian Wood festival in Oslo, Norway. Photo by Per Ole Hagen

EPIC WAIL

MASTODON'S BRENT HINDS AND BILL KELLIHER TALK ABOUT THEIR CONCEPT METAL'S SLOW-BUT-SURE CRAWL FROM PRIMORDIAL SLUDGE TO THE MORE MELODIC AND ARTSY APPROACH ON THEIR HIGHLY-ANTICIPATED NEW ALBUM, *THE HUNTER*.

BY CHRIS KIES

Unlike the prehistoric mammal it's named after, Atlanta-based metal quartet Mastodon is adept at evolving. The band's 2002 debut, *Remission*—a sludge-metal concept album—had guitarists Brent Hinds and Bill Kelliher combining Dream Theater-level technicality with Sabbath-meets-Motörhead grooves and moods, and even a slight nod to the Allman Brothers on "Ol'e Nessie." Mastodon's sophomore effort, 2004's *Leviathan*, was an onslaught of head-banging goodness with a little Thin Lizzy panache mixed in. It garnered the band Album of the Year awards from *Kerrang!*, *Terrorizer*, and other publications catering to the metal crowd.

Up to that point, the band's vocal approach had leaned more toward guttural roars, but 2006's *Blood Mountain* saw a shift, with Hinds and bassist Troy Sanders—who share vocal duties—exploring a more melodic bent. But the band's biggest leap forward—both creatively and commercially—came with 2009's *Crack the Skye*. By far the tightest, most cohesive album in their catalog up to that point, the seven-song epic showed hints of Pink Floyd and Yes influences, as well as expanded guitar palettes: Hinds and Kelliher dialed in more clean tones, and their First Act Custom Shop 9- and 12-string axes provided a sound that Hinds described as a "ringing, atonal chorus effect unmatched by any chorus pedal."

However, for this year's *The Hunter*, Kelliher and Hinds veered away from the concept approach. "The new album is about nothing," says Hinds, who also leads the surfabilly band Fiend Without a Face and several other side projects during Mastodon downtime. But the difference on *The Hunter* isn't just lyrical. On past albums, Hinds took the lead on riff writing, but this time around Kelliher contributed more song ideas, and both wrote and recorded their own riffs and songs individually. "It's tighter because we did it this way," says Kelliher. Both guitarists also experimented with new gear.

Your previous albums have been pretty epic. How did your approach differ for *The Hunter*?

Kelliher: With *Crack the Skye*, most of those riffs were written by Brent, but this time we all contributed musical ideas. We decided to take a different approach, because we're all pretty busy outside the world of Mastodon, and after touring for nearly two years we really wanted to take a break. Before *The Hunter*, when Brent would a write a song—or vice versa—the other person would learn it and double it, or come up with their own complementary part. But on *The Hunter*, there are parts and songs where it's strictly Brann [Dailor, drums] and me or Brent and Brann—that's something we've never really done before.

Hinds: I really didn't approach *The Hunter* any different than our previous albums. We just decided—like we always do—to write and record a cool album that's badass, and to do the best we can. I play guitar so much in Mastodon and my other bands that I don't really block out time to write—if something comes to me while I'm jamming and it sticks with me, I'll generally try recording it. But if I forget the riff or idea, then it probably wasn't meant to be.

Bill, are you happy with how the different writing approach worked out this time?

Kelliher: It was real spontaneous—some of the stuff was even written while in the studio rehearsing and recording other songs. But honestly, I was really nervous about going at this album with the attitude of "Let's just go record—even though we don't know each other's parts." But our producer, Mike Elizondo, reassured us that a lot of bands do it that way—he mentioned that James [Hetfield, vocalist/rhythm guitar] in Metallica records all his parts, and then Kirk [Hammett, lead guitar] comes in and records the solos. Don't get me wrong, though—the stuff we've done in the past, with those contrasting guitar tones and mannerisms, do give a song a bigger feel. Brent and I, James and Kirk of Metallica, or *any* two guitarists are never going to play the same song or the same riff the same. So I feel *The Hunter* is a tighter album because we did it this way.

The whole album seems to groove a little more than past albums, especially on

songs like "Black Tongue," "Curl of the Burl," and "Blasteroid." What do you attribute that to?

Kelliher: I think it was the atmosphere and mentality of not feeling pressure to perfect every nook and cranny of every song. We just went at it with a fun, low-key attitude that allowed us to really go places we've haven't explored yet with Mastodon. With "Curl of the Burl," that was a chorus and drum riff that Brann had for a long time, and Brent came in and added the intro riff. Whether a song is a skull-crusher or a ballad, you need to have a catchy groove—that's something we strive for on every song. If you can't write a great song, at least write a great groove [*laughs*].

Kelliher plays his 1974 Les Paul Custom and Hinds plays his Electrical Guitar Company signature model while tracking *The Hunter* at Doppler Studios in Atlanta, Georgia. Photo by Andrew Stuart

What was it like working with Mike Elizondo?

Hinds: Amazing. Mike is a great man—I'd vote for Mr. Elizondo for president. I really liked working with Matt Bayles on our first three records, even though it was a battle at times, because we weren't really known or trusted as musicians yet, so we'd have creative conflicts like you would in any recording environment. Brendan [O'Brien] was *the* guy for *Crack the Skye*, but I'm glad we went with Mike, because he let us do our thing while maintaining some control and having lucid and constructive input for our song structures and guitar parts.

Kelliher: Brendan was the right choice for *Crack the Skye*, because we wanted that '80s classic-rock sound, and Brendan has worked with so many acts of that genre—like AC/DC and Springsteen—so it was just the perfect fit. That album was so dialed-in and meticulous that it was helpful to have a guy pushing for perfection. But we did so many sessions and takes that it was grueling. Mike was full of energy and so excited to be with us that it just immediately clicked. Usually, when I record my parts in the studio, no one is very vocal or directing me if something sounds bad—or suggesting I try it in a different key or with a different guitar. But Mike was really vocal on what was working and wasn't for my guitar parts.

What sorts of things would he say?

Kelliher: Sometimes I'd be going overboard with my solos or adding too many tracks. I kept layering "guitarmonies" [harmonies] and ambient noises, and it would be too much at points and he'd let me know that what I originally recorded was good enough. It was a good, creative back and forth.

Which song would you say he was particularly helpful on?

Kelliher: "Black Tongue." The verse riff was an old riff I'd been hammering on for years, and the beginning riff for the chorus was something Brann came up with when we were messing around in rehearsals. The part that ties it altogether is the middle section with its groove—I came up with that while jamming alone one night. And then we recorded all the parts and glued them together with Mike's help. I really like the guitarmonies I came up with by accident one night in the studio. I actually did half of the solo—the first 20 seconds—on my laptop in a hotel room in France while we were on tour. That shows you how this record was done in comparison to *Crack the Skye*, and how far technology has progressed. I completed that solo's harmony part at 4 p.m., emailed it to Mike, and then he mixed it and sent us the finished song the next day. It's amazing that you can write and record ideas thousands of miles away for your album [*laughs*].

"WE WANTED TO DO A PARTY RECORD THAT WAS FUN TO MAKE—AND HOPEFULLY FUN FOR FANS TO CRANK UP AND JAM WITH SOME FRIENDS." —BILL KELLIHER

What did you use to record in the hotel room?

Kelliher: I had a Yamaha SBG2000 and my Marshall Micro Stack and some Shure condenser mics I was going to use, but I decided to run it through AmpliTube's Marshall amp models, because Warner Bros. was asking for the song to be done so they could release it as a single the next morning in the USA. I was like, "It's not done yet!" [*Laughs.*] When I got done, I was so proud of myself and felt really good about it, because I had gotten it down and everyone liked it. I kind of live for moments like that. I'm a multitasker by nature. My wife says I should focus on one thing at a time—because I'm always doing several things at once—but in this instance it worked out. The deadline forced me to work some fast magic, but I don't advise anyone to do that on a regular basis!

YouTube It

Kelliher and Hinds tear it up on one of Mastodon's heaviest *Remission*-era songs at the 2005 With Full Force Festival in Germany. **YouTube search term:** Mastodon - Mother Puncher (live)

This 2006 performance of *Leviathan's* 13-minute opus in Nottingham, England, opens with broodingly overdriven guitars and slowly builds to a tidal wave of epic metal. **YouTube search term:** Mastodon - Hearts Alive HD Live 1/15 Rock City Nottingham December 12, 2006

This video from a 2009 Chicago gig shows Kelliher playing his custom First Act 9-string and Hinds playing his custom First Act 12-string on "Ghost of Karelia" from *Crack the Skye*. **YouTube search term:** Mastodon - Ghost of Karelia [Live]

What did you use for the other half of the solo?

Kelliher: The second part of the solo was done in the studio before that European tour, and I really like it because it has that "Orion" [from Metallica's *Master of Puppets*] feel and groove. I used this new Gibson Explorer with EMG X Series 81 and 85 humbuckers. It's a metal-shredding beast that doesn't sound phony—it's quickly become my go-to super-heavy guitar. I plug straight into the amp for the majority of my recordings, so when I need something gargantuan, I have that in my back pocket. I used to hate active pickups and thought they sounded brittle and stale, but I totally dig their tone with my Explorer—it's a clear, concise, unique distortion. I use that

guitar a lot on "All the Heavy Lifting" and some of the harmonies on "Curl of the Burl."

With its Alan Parsons Project-/Pink Floyd-style synths and chanting choirs, "The Creature Lives" is very theatrical. What was the impetus for that song?

Kelliher: [*Laughs.*] That was *all* Brann's idea. He wrote it years ago and he pretty much directed and composed how everything fell into place. He thinks it's going to be one of those lift-your-lighter-in-the-air-and-sway songs. I'm sure Mastodon fans will think, 'What the hell is this?' But I've heard some people compare it old Pink Floyd, with the prog-y Hammond organs. *Crack the Skye* was a serious record—it was a healing process for a lot of people. And that's not to say *The Hunter* isn't going to cure some ills, too, but we wanted to do a party record that was fun to make—and hopefully fun for fans to crank up and jam with some friends.

What's your favorite part of the new album?

Kelliher: I'd have to say the middle of "All the Heavy Lifting," where there's all this craziness between my guitar parts and Brann's drumming. It was a spontaneous riff that I wrote while we were putting the song together, and I kind of just made it by the seat of my pants with all this creative energy swirling and pressure mounting.

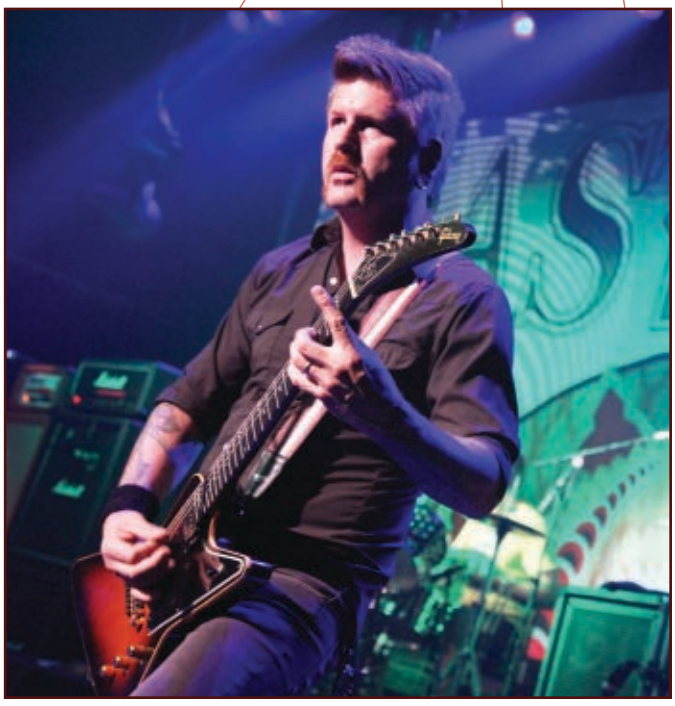
Hinds: The guitar-and-drum solo part in "The Hunter"—where Brann and me play off each other—it screams "Check this out!" When you hear me and Brann bounce off each other in those moments where he takes the lead with some fills and I'm sustaining, and then I take over again—it's a really cool thing to be in a band where you have that romantic cadence between the different instruments. I'm not sure if Deep Purple was one of the first bands to have a drum solo and a guitar solo going at the same time, but I like how it turned out a lot.

"Bedazzled Fingernails" has some pretty mind-boggling stuff going on with the timing and the riffs. How did that song develop?

Hinds: You're, like, the third person that's interviewed me that has asked about that song—that's a great sign. That has been a riff I've been playing around with for a long time, but it never really worked in anything else until *The Hunter* sessions.

Those syncopated riffs sound pretty difficult to play.

Hinds: That's the whole point—it sounds difficult, but that doesn't mean it *is* difficult. Guitar playing is like being a magician—you try to do more with less and work smarter, not harder. I've played with hybrid-style picking—using a pick along with my middle, ring, and pinky fingers—forever, because I learned on the banjo first. But on this song I don't really use a pick that much, I'm just using my open fingers with hammer-ons and pull-offs to get that confusing, high-speed riff illusion.



Kelliher barres his 1980 Gibson Explorer at a June 2011 Netherlands gig. Photo by Cindy Frey

The main riff in "The Octopus Has No Friends" sounds pretty brutal, too.

Hinds: That's just how I play guitar. That type of hybrid picking will always be a big part of my playing—whether it's in Mastodon or my side bands. For "Octopus," I just wanted to make things sound as crazy—like raindrops—and chorus-y as possible, so I really worked it up to speed on my 9-string First Act, because it creates those natural chorus

Hinds on His Acrylic V

The 25.1"-scale acrylic guitar that Brent Hinds favors for his work in Mastodon was built to his specs by Electrical Guitar Company's Kevin Burkett. Hinds requested a V-shaped body with a Maestro Vibrato and high-output ECG alnico 5 humbuckers. "The pickups are double potted—wax and epoxy—to help keep the microphonics down at high volumes," says Burkett.

The Brent Hinds Custom also has a Schaller bridge, Grover tuners, and stainless steel frets. "I love the unique tone the guitars have—they're brighter and had clearer highs than any other guitars I played," Hinds says. "The other part I really like is how thin and flat the neck is." The aluminum neck measures 1.65" at the nut and features a slotted headstock that looks like a cross between what you'd find on a fingerstyle acoustic guitar and those found on 1970s aluminum-neck solidbodies.

Hinds holds his Electrical Guitar Company signature V outisde the Earl in Atlanta.

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sounds that even the best pedal can't make.

Did you use your 9- and 12-string First Act guitars on other songs?
Hinds: They're probably featured on nine of the 14 songs. I love playing big, open chords on them, and then also layering jangly parts when picking the strings really fast. The octave strings create this ringing, atonal chorus effect unmatched by any chorus pedal. A 6-string and a pedal sounds stale in comparison.
Kelliher: I didn't really use those at all on this album. They offered those ringing dynamics and overtones we were looking for on *Crack the Skye*, but that wasn't something I strived for on *The Hunter*.

What was your go-to guitar for these sessions?
Hinds: My Mastodon guitar would have to be the Electrical Guitar Company acrylic V that Kevin Burkett built me a few years ago. I've always loved Gibson Flying Vs, and my friends King Buzzo [the Melvins] and Laura Pleasants [Kylesa] had theses killer aluminum-body-and-neck guitars from Electrical Guitar Company. So I talked to Kevin and had him make one of his V models for me. It's a little heavy still—that's something we'll continue to work on—but it sounds great and is unique, as far as looks *and* tone—especially its sustain.

Sustain is a big deal to you, isn't it?
Hinds: Sustain is one of the most important things to me when it comes to tone and my setup. I like it so much, if I had a kid, I'd name it Sustain [*laughs*]. But honestly, I love sustain because it's ghostly. It has weird textures, majestic energy, and spooky overtones that add so much depth and soul to your playing—it's an organic interaction between you, the guitar, and the amp. I live for those overdriven vibrations and emotions.

Left to right: Hinds, Kelliher, and bassist/vocalist Troy Sanders onstage in the Netherlands. Photo by Cindy Frey

Bill, other than that Yamaha you mentioned, what guitars did you use for *The Hunter*?
Kelliher: My main guitar is a '74 Gibson Les Paul Custom 20th Anniversary tobacco burst that I recently had refretted and set up with all new hardware and volume and tone pots by the Gibson USA Custom Shop. They put in their killer '57 Classic humbuckers, too. I also got turned on to a Fender Jim Root Telecaster that Jim gave me. It has EMG 81 and 60 pickups, but it still has the Telecaster twang to it—especially when you play close to the bridge. I was surprised. I used that on the intro to "All the Heavy Lifting"—where it has all those high notes—and then again on "Black Tongue," where Brann's double-bass part goes, I added some high notes into the mix with it, too.

What about amps?
Kelliher: I used my old, 2-channel Marshall JCM800s, because I always find myself going back to those amps for *my* tone. I really like the punch they offer and how I can cut through and be heard between Brann's crazy drumming, Brent's riffs, and Troy's bass lines. I used my 100-watt Marshall Kerry King JCM800 for layering and a few other parts, but the main parts were recorded with the old JCM800s. All my amps went through this beat up Marshall 1960B 4x12 loaded with 20-watt Celestions. I love trying new gear all the time, but I always seem to come back to the Marshalls.
Hinds: I used a lot of amps for *The Hunter*—a Diezel VH4, an Orange Rockerverb 50, a Marshall 100-watt JMP Mark II Lead Series head, and an '80s JCM800—but the one I used the most was a '70 Fender silverface Princeton Reverb. No matter what guitar I used with that Princeton, it sounded and performed the best—especially for my single-note runs and clean, textural parts. For the heavier, chunky riffs and distorted solos, I used the big monster heads. I'm old-school like that.

Tell us about the cool, slow warble effect you get with your wah on "Dry Bone Valley."
Hinds: To be considered a bona fide guitarist, you need to record one wah song. I'm starting to get pretty fond of it—I might start wearing bell-bottoms [*laughs*]. That slow sweep combined with some serious hammer-ons at the beginning are my favorite—it's like a helicopter swooping down to capture swimmers in Niagara Falls. Jerry Cantrell got me one of his signature Jim Dunlop Crybaby wahs, and I figured "Dry Bone Valley" has the perfect swaggering, galloping vibe to the chorus and verses that leads right up to the wah solo perfectly.

Did either of you use any other effects on the album?
Kelliher: Probably the only effect I used was my original Ibanez Tube King, for when I really want to take it over the top and soar.
Hinds: I have an old Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, a Visual Sound Route 66 overdrive, a Boss RE-20 Space Echo, a Boss DD-6 Digital Delay, a Custom Audio Electronics Boost/Overdrive, a Morpheus DropTune, and a personal favorite is the Monster Effects Mastortion, which my friend John Spears built for me. It's basically a TS808 Tube Screamer clone with more volume and low-end power.

Mastodon's guitar sound has evolved over the years from a fast, sludgy barrage to a more

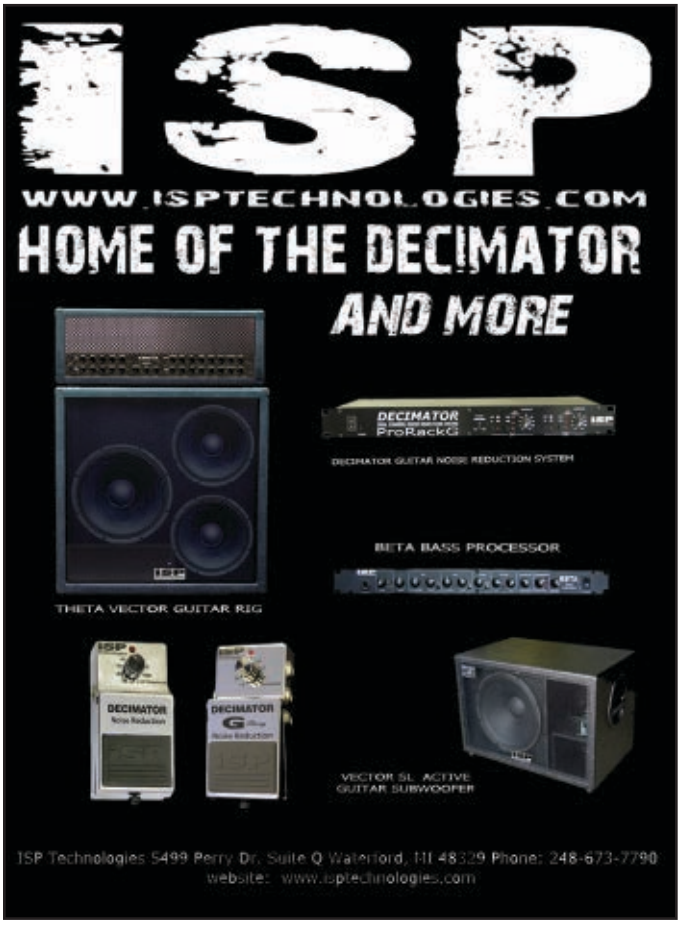
Monster Effects' John Spears on the Mastortion

"The first design I presented to Brent was a little too subtle," remembers Monster Effects John Spears. "Or, as he put it, 'This thing sucks.' After that, my goal was to make an overdrive with sufficient gain, a big bottom, and a butt load of volume."

Built off Spears' favorite Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer with a JRC4558D chip, the Mastortion came to fruition after a long trial-and-error process during which the designer experimented with various capacitor values to work past the pedal's mid-range hump. At his friend Bob Starr's suggestion, Spears used Panasonic ECQ-B capacitors and a circuit board with a huge ground plane to keep noise at a minimum. Other features include a rectifier that enables the pedal to work with positive or negative center-pin power adapters, voltage protection, a choke that smoothes the current, and power-switching on the output jack that prevents a popping sound when a 1/4" cable is unplugged during operation.

"When Brent came over to check out one of the final prototypes, he just smiled and kept playing," says Spears. "I knew we'd achieved customer satisfaction."

LEFT: An early Mastortion prototype. **ABOVE:** Hinds at home testing the final design through John Spears' Atom Amp Metroliner. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Mastortion, features artwork by Brian Papa.



melodic and subdued aggression. What do you attribute that to?

Hinds: We used keyboards all over *Crack the Skye*, and again with *The Hunter*. Keyboards and organs add another dimension that can't be achieved with anything else. They give us this old-school, classic-rock vibe that we really want to be a part of the band. I'm sure some metal fans laugh at the organ and its spot in Mastodon, but it's a badass instrument.

I love playing fast and heavy like we did on *Call of the Mastodon* and *Remission*, and we'll always have that metal feel—because we all love it—but adding the melodies and harmonies, and diversifying our sound all the way up to *Crack the Skye* has made us a better band. The band we became during those sessions was where I saw us going years ago, but we had to experiment and find it ourselves instead of forcing the issue. And with *The Hunter*, it was about incorporating all the elements from our previous records and our collective and individual influences, and bringing it together for a fun, good-time, party record. *The Hunter* represents Mastodon's full body of work.

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Hinds' guitars (left to right): First Act 12-/6-string doubleneck, First Act Lola 12-string, Gibson SG, Gibson Flying V, and Electrical Guitar Company signature V. Photo by Chris Kies

Kelliher's guitars (left to right): Two Les Paul Customs, an EMG-equipped Gibson Explorer, two Yamaha SBG2000s, a First Act Lola 9-string, another Les Paul Custom, and another Explorer. Photo by Chris Kies

Brent Hinds' Gearbox

GUITARS
Electrical Guitar Company Brent Hinds Custom, First Act Custom Shop Lola 9-string, First Act Custom Shop Lola 12-string, Gibson SG, Gibson Flying V, Gibson LP-295 Goldtop Les Paul

AMPS
Orange Rockerverb 50, Diezel VH4, '80s Marshall JCM800, '76 Marshall 100-watt JMP Mark II Lead Series, '70 Fender Princeton Reverb, Marshall 4x12 with 75-watt Celestions, Orange 4x12, Diezel 4x12

EFFECTS
Monster Effects Mastortion, Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, Visual Sound Route 66, Boss RE-20 Space Echo, Boss DD-6 Digital Delay, Custom Audio Electronics Boost/Overdrive, Boss GE-7 Equalizer, Morpheus DropTune, Jim Dunlop JC95 Jerry Cantrell Signature Wah

STRINGS AND PICKS
D'Addario EXL110s, D'Addario EXL116s (for D, dropped-D, and dropped-C tunings), Dunlop Ultex 1.0 mm picks

Bill Kelliher's Gearbox

GUITARS
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom 20th Anniversary, Fender Jim Root Signature Telecaster, two Yamaha SBG2000s, Gibson Les Paul Custom, '82 Gibson Les Paul Custom, 1980 Gibson Explorer, Gibson Explorer with EMGs

AMPS
Marshall 2203KK Kerry King Signature JCM800, two '80s 2-channel Marshall JCM800s, IK Multimedia AmpliTube recording software, Marshall 1960B 4x12 cabinet with 20-watt Celestions

EFFECTS
Ibanez Tube King Overdrive

STRINGS AND PICKS
D'Addario EXL140s,
Jim Dunlop Custom
Bill Kelliher Tortex
Sharp .88mm picks

the player's choice™

ADAM DUTKIEWICZ
TIMES OF GRACE / KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

JOEL STROETZEL
TIMES OF GRACE / KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

MIKE MCKENZIE
THE RED CHORD

MARK HEYLMUN
SUICIDE SILENCE

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Open For Visits

THE FENDER VISITOR CENTER

One of the world's biggest guitar makers opens its doors to the public for the first time ever with a new Visitor Center and factory tours—a symbol of the musician-friendly leadership new CEO Larry Thomas hopes to bring to the company.

PHOTOS AND STORY BY REBECCA DIRKS

ABOVE: The Visitor Center's walls are lined with instruments that can be plucked down, taken into the sound room, plugged in, and played by the general public. Each instrument is explained by a pick-shaped plaque and is surrounded by photos, album covers, and advertisements that help tell the story. The main wall opposite the entrance features classic examples of Fender's iconic guitar shapes: the Tele, Jazz bass, Strat, Jazzmaster, Precision bass, Jaguar, and Mustang.

"I'm the first musician to run Fender," CEO Larry Thomas told me proudly after the cameras had stopped rolling on our private tour of the company's new 8,600-square-foot Visitor Center. Though not quick to discuss himself—it was the first time he'd shifted focus from the new facility during our visit—it's clear that leading Fender from a guitarist's perspective is important to Thomas. And opening the Visitor Center and public factory tours was one of the first big projects on his radar. Thomas, who worked his way from salesman to CEO at Guitar Center prior to taking the reigns at Fender in 2010, told us that this is just the beginning. "We now have over 500 products in R&D … we're working to get to market so much quicker than ever before," he explained.

Though Thomas' statements are resoundingly forward-looking, the company remains grounded in the legacy created by the past. This is evident in the Visitor Center, which serves as a tribute to the designers, luthiers, musicians, and songs that made Fender famous throughout the past 60 years.

The center opened on September 19, 2011, following two nights of grand opening celebrations. The first night was a party thrown for Fender's employees and their families. More than 2,000 people attended—including Eddie Van Halen and Steve Miller—and enjoyed a night of live music headlined by Los Lobos. The second night was a sneak peek for media and VIPs. Fender players like John 5 and Duff McKagan mingled with guitar-industry notables like Phyllis Fender, Janie Hendrix, and Seymour Duncan, while Dave Mason, Raphael Saadiq, and Buddy Guy with 12-year-old protégé Quinn Sullivan provided the tunes. Fender even had a surprise preview of new Eric Clapton signature amps on hand (see pg. 108).

Now that the center has opened to the public, visitors to Corona, California, can stop by any weekday, except Wednesday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and take in the sights and sounds of Fender heritage with no admission charge. Every guitar hanging on the wall can be played in an amp-filled sound room, and visitors can even design their dream guitar and have it built in the very factory they tour. The factory tours, offered at 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m., are also free, but visitors must be age 9 or older and be wearing closed-toe shoes to participate.

While we'll have to wait and see what comes of Fender's beefed-up R&D, the Visitor Center is here now—and it's bound to become a Mecca for guitarists. Enjoy this look inside, then head to premierguitar.com to watch our video tour, guided by CEO Larry Thomas, along with a tour of the Fender amp factory (not open to the public) and demos of the new Eric Clapton signature amps.

1. As you enter the Visitor Center, you are immediately greeted by a wall of Custom Shop replicas of some of the iconic instruments used by the musicians who put Fender on the map: Buddy Holly, Buddy Guy, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Ritchie Blackmore, David Gilmour, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Kurt Cobain.

2. Across from the Fender Legends entrance is the Fender Hall of Fame. Plaques pay tribute to the most influential people and bands in Fender's history, including the company's founders and notable company employees over the years. The white Strat in the center is signed by all of the living Hall of Fame members.

3. The Birthplace of Innovation wall displays photos of the early factory as well as informational tidbits. We particularly loved the lower-left photo of an employee demonstrating the strength of Fender necks by standing on one balanced between two chairs. In a small theater at the opposite corner of the facility, visitors can view a loop of four films that provide a closer look into the company's early days and influence.

4. Immediately to the right of the main entrance is a tribute to Leo Fender encased in glass. It's packed with early Fender-built instruments and candid photos of the man who built the company. (Inset) One of Leo's first ever instruments, a lap steel baked in his oven.

5. Visitors to the center could spend all day trying out different guitar-amp combinations in the sound room, which is packed with nearly every guitar and bass amp Fender offers. There are a variety of Fender, Jackson, Charvel, Gretsch, and EVH models in the room (including some lefty versions!), but visitors can bring any of the display guitars in for a test drive as well.

6. For anyone who has wished they could customize every option to create their dream Fender, the company has answered that request with the American Design Experience. Inside, visitors can feel and choose different neck shapes and wood configurations, see a wide variety of finish options, and select the pickup-pickguard-switching configuration of their choice. The guitars are ordered right then and there, put into production, and delivered to the buyer's home in less than a month. The flame maple Tele on the bench serves as one of the examples of what can be ordered.

CUSACK AMPS
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1. The farthest wall of guitars features examples from Fender's many American series—along with explanations of the difference between American Vintage, American Standard, American Deluxe, and American Special lines—and photos and posters representing associated musicians. The top third of every wall lists songs written or recorded with Fender instruments, from the early days of rock onward.
2. There are a few displays of Fender signature artist models, which, like every guitar not encased in glass, can be picked up and played by visitors. This wall features John Mayer, Robert Cray, Eric Johnson, and Jimmie Vaughan Strats, a GE Smith Tele, a Sting Precision Bass, and a Roger Waters Jazz Bass. Jeff Beck, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Mark Knopfler instruments are in the glass display case.
3. In addition to the signature models hanging on the walls, the main floor has standing displays for artists in all genres, like this tribute to The Boss. Fender amps are also on display throughout the main floor, with playable versions in the sound room.
4. Previewed first at the Fender Visitor Center events, this 5-watt Eric Clapton Vibro-Champ is one of three new amps bearing Slowhand's stamp of approval. The line features the 12-watt Tremolux and the 40-watt Twinolux. All three are hand-wired and feaure tube-bias tremolo circuits and a switchable power attenuator, per Clapton's request.
5. The EVH brand has Wolfgang guitars on display, in addition to this painstaking replica of Eddie's most famous axe. The 2007 Custom Shop replica has every detail, down to the year of the quarter and the loosely hanging trem bar.
6. The Visitors Center does not limit the displays to Fender instruments. Also included are displays of the other brands under the Fender Musical Instrument Corporation banner, like this wall of Jacksons. The models on display include production and artist signature models, as well as Custom Shop renditions like the replica of Randy Rhoads' Concorde V.
7. Of course, if visitors want to leave the center with something to remember the trip by (and can't afford that dream guitar just yet), Fender has plenty of swag to choose from. Shirts, books, art, strings, cables, and other accessories are among the items visitors can take home with them.

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Photo by Claude Fourez

AFTER JUST SEVEN YEARS OF PLAYING, 22-YEAR-OLD SINGER/GUITARIST SAMANTHA FISH IS TOURING THE WORLD AND GARNERING A REPUTATION AS A RIPPING BLUES-ROCKER WITH A VERY PROMISING FUTURE.

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

In the seven years since she first picked up a guitar, Samantha Fish has accomplished what scores of musicians strive for throughout their career—and rarely achieve: She secured a record deal, toured the world, and now makes a living solely from her music. By all signs, she seems poised to become a key figure in modern blues. All at the tender age of 22. And she didn't pull it off by using some Rebecca Black-style YouTube stunt or having an industry connection. She did it the old-fashioned way, by playing her ass off and paying her dues night after night in dingy, smelly clubs.

As a teen, after a long night of delivering pizzas, Fish would sneak into Knuckleheads in Kansas City, Missouri, to check out big-name blues guitarists. She also sat in with them at every opportunity, and soon she became a fixture on the blues scene there. Eventually, she quit her job and went after music full-time.

In February 2010, Fish recorded and produced a live album entitled *Live Bait*. Word spread quickly, and it wasn't long before the stars aligned, so to speak: Tina Terry of Piedmont Talent saw Fish perform at Knuckleheads and was so impressed that she referred Fish to the company's director, Steve Hecht, who then contacted Thomas Ruf of Ruf Records. Soon after, Fish was offered a contract. Upon signing the deal, the label put Fish on *Girls with Guitars*, an album that placed her alongside female blues artists Cassie Taylor and Dani Wilde. This act toured Europe and the United States on the Ruf Records 2011 Blues Caravan.

Fish's debut Ruf Records album, *Runaway*, was released last summer, and it's an impressive outing that spans several styles—from the rumba-fied country-boogie of "Soft and Slow" to the smoky jazz vibe of "Feelin' Alright" and "Today's My Day."

Photo by Aigars Lapsa

Who are your main influences?
That's a hard question, because there's so many. I grew up listening to a lot of classic rock, like Tom Petty, the Rolling Stones, and Sheryl Crow. Keith Urban was also a real big deal for me, growing up. When I was 17, I went to his concert, and I wanted to learn how to play lead after that. Stevie Ray Vaughan was also a big influence on me. I take influences from different styles of guitarists, but when I got into the blues it was, like, Freddie King and the old Delta guys. Right now, I'm really into Elmore James and contemporary guys like Mike Zito, Ronnie Baker Brooks, Michael Burks, Tommy Castro, and Tab Benoit—who is *huge* for me.

How did you make the shift from Sheryl Crow to the blues?
I was 18, and I wanted to go out and jam in Kansas City. I live in a blues town, but I didn't really know much about it until I started going out to the open jams. I didn't even want to play the blues at first. I was into classic rock and I wanted to be a rocker, but then I started playing the blues and I felt the soul in it. I fell in love with it and started doing my homework by listening to the old guys like Son House and Skip James.

AS FAR AS BLUES GOES, IT'S MORE ABOUT TALKING AND PHRASING. THAT'S SOMETHING I'M TRYING TO MAKE MY PRIORITY.

Did you ever take guitar lessons?
Not really. I took a couple of lessons here and there, but I'm mostly self-taught. When I was about 18, I started hitting the scales hard, trying to be a lead player. I started just making up my own solos, picking up little bits and pieces from things that I heard. I never had the patience to sit down and learn somebody's solo, note-for-note. I kind of wish I did have the patience, but I would get distracted and start doing my own thing.

After you got a grip on blues scales, how did you develop an ear for the subtler aspects of blues—like accurate intonation, expressive yet controlled vibrato, and pacing?
Honestly, I just watched other guitar players. If you watch enough guitar players, you start to see and feel what you're missing in your own playing—you start to pick out things you want to learn. I could hear them do the stops and the pacing and the talking and the vibrato, and it was like, "Okay, I'm missing that. I need to work on that."

Also, a lot of it is that you just play what feels right. Bending and vibrato are such a big part of being a blues guitarist that you can't ignore them. When I'm at a jam and they're just shredding my ass, I have to pay attention to what they're doing.

Let's talk about the new album. Your solo phrasing is very musical—it sounds like it developed naturally.
As far as blues goes, it's more about talking and phrasing. That's something I'm trying to make my priority. I'm still working it out. Shredding's cool, but it's not the priority when you're a blues guitarist.

The main riff and rhythm part for "Down in the Swamp" has some evil-sounding half-steps and is kind of reminiscent of the riff to "Politician."
Yeah, I play "Politician," too, and I love it [*laughs*]. I'm the half-step queen. I love that minor-y, half-step feel, and a lot of my songs have that. "Down in the Swamp" is kind of my swampy, dirty, evil song.

Is a riff-based rhythm like that trickier to sing over than a strummed, chord-based part?
Not really. I've written a bunch of songs like this where, at first, it was like, "I'll never be able to sing over this." But with a lot of practice, I taught myself how to sing and play guitar at the same time, and now I can split the brain in half a little bit. I try to do the weird riff, and sometimes I mess up, of course. I don't really think about it unless it feels unnatural, and that one just felt natural. It took a little bit of practice to get the timing right, but I've played it so many times now that it's second nature.

There are a lot of neat fills in "Money to Burn." Are you articulating them with your picking-hand fingers?
I hold the pick between my first finger and thumb, and sometimes I'll pluck with my three other fingers. Sometimes, I'll

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YouTube It

For a taste of Samantha Fish's vocal and instrumental prowess, check out the following clips on YouTube.com.

Fish wields her Larry James-built Bluesmaster while leading her band through "Darker Side of Love" at the 2010 Blues from the Top Festival in Winter Park, Colorado.
YouTube search term: Samantha Fish – "Darker Side of Love" (High Quality)

Back on her home turf, Fish gets bluesy at the Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri.
YouTube search term: The Samantha Fish Blues Band - RRW #408

Fish with Cassie Taylor and Dani Wilde at Muddy's Club in Weinheim, Germany, during the 2011 Ruf Records Blues Caravan tour.
YouTube search term: Ruf's Blues Caravan 2011 - Live Muddys Club Weinheim - Cassie Taylor, Samantha Fish, Dani Wild

I'M OPEN TO ANY DIRECTION OF MUSIC, AS LONG AS IT'S PROGRESS FOR ME.

tuck the pick away and just play with my thumb. It depends.

"Today's My Day" features a nice slide solo. Did you play that?
All the pretty slide work was done by Mike Zito. I'm completely new to slide. I had to learn how to play slide for the *Girls with Guitars* tour. My first attempt was on Cassie Taylor's "Leaving Chicago," on the *Girls with Guitars* record. And I played slide on "Leavin' Kind" on my record.

Did you use a different tuning on that one?
Anything I've written with slide, like "Leavin' Kind," I wrote in standard tuning. I'd bring one guitar to my gigs, so I didn't have time to drop the tuning and fiddle around. You know, I think that's what kept me away from slide for such a long time. When I get more of an arsenal, I'll probably do more drop tunings. I love the sound of that—I just haven't quite tapped into it yet.

You've got a killer tone on "Leavin' Kind." What was the setup there?
I used Fulltone Clyde wah and OCD pedals. I'm not a big fan of distortion pedals. I'm kind of a minimalist. If you look at my setup, I've got one thing, which is the OCD—I absolutely love it. With Tube Screamers and all that, it kind of cuts the signal and distorts it. I'm just not into the distorted sound, but the Tube Screamer does open things up, making it sound like an amp on full blast, so you don't have to turn it up as loud, which is good. I'm not knocking

Photo by Steve Hecht

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it, though, and I think we actually *do* have a Tube Screamer on the record.

The verse of "Otherside of the Bottle" goes back and forth quickly between a clean sound for the arpeggiated chords and a raunchy, about-to-break-up sound for the chord stabs. Are you using a pedal to make those transitions?
No. I just alternate between fingerpicking and a guitar pick. Some of the softer, more rounded-out tones are fingerpicked, and on the harder stuff with more attack I'm using the pick.

Is your guitar's volume knob at the same level throughout, or do you turn it up for the aggressive part?
I pretty much leave it the same for both sections—around 6 or 7. Then I'll turn it up for the solo. When I go to the bridge, I turn it all the way up and just start strumming with the pick.

In the solo to "Feelin' Alright," you incorporate some jazz-influenced ideas in your solo—sort of a harmonically informed approach to the blues à la Larry Carlton or Robben Ford. Is that something you've been studying?
Yeah, we were doing a lot of diminished stuff on that. It's different from anything else on the record, I think. I love Robben Ford. I watch videos of him on YouTube all the time just to see if I can find any little tidbits here and there that I can pick up, but I really find myself in this swampy, Delta, caveman-style of music. Who knows what the future will bring. I'm probably going to head down that route later. I'm open to any direction of music, as long as it's progress for me. I have a great appreciation for that kind of music, it's just not what naturally comes out when I play.

Samantha Fish's Gearbox

Guitars
2011 Fender Blacktop Telecaster with Lindy Fralin humbuckers, thinline Bluesmaster T-style guitar built by Larry James of Larry's Custom Guitars, Alvarez dreadnought

Amps
Fender '65 Super Reverb reissue, Bojan Mihajlovic amp 2x12 with NOS 6L6 power tubes

Effects
Fulltone OCD, Fulltone Clyde wah (not shown)

Strings, Picks, and Accessories
D'Addario .010 sets, Dunlop 1.0 mm picks, Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner (left), Monster Cable, Mogami cables

Let's talk about your career. What are the pros and cons of being a female blues guitarist?
There are definitely pros and cons—it works both ways. The cons are that people don't always take you seriously right off the bat. They'll come out just to see a girl play guitar and, for me, I always hated the idea of the gimmick. People come out just because you are a girl, but then you have so much more that you have to prove once you get them in the door. I mean, it *does* get them in the door, but they're skeptical when they're there. You have to win them over, it's like, "Hey man, I really take this seriously, so I hope you will, too."

Tell us about the *Girls with Guitars* album.
It went hand in hand with my record deal. Sometimes Ruf Records puts new artists on their Blues Caravan. Since it's an established tour, I could walk into these crowds and debut myself on their label. That way, I could build up an audience, and then when I came back with my own band it would be a lot easier to tour.

Was it competitive onstage between you, Cassie, and Dani?
Of course everyone wants to do the best job they can do but, really, I don't get that whole competitive thing—especially when I play with the girls. Me and Dani start doing our solos, and we're such different guitar players that we're just trying to do our own thing. We just want to play together and make it sound good. When you start trying to get over the top of somebody, you lose what makes it great. That's when you lose the musical aspect of it.

Do you see yourself ever transitioning from the blues to more commercial music, like some of the artists you grew up on?
I was actually having a conversation with somebody about this last night. If I happen to write a song that's more successful in the mainstream, then more power to it. But I'm not going to go out of my way to do it. Whatever comes out comes out, as long as it comes out naturally. As long as it's something that I come out with because I want to and not because I'm trying to get famous. With the blues, you can't lie. If you don't feel it, the audience isn't going to feel it.

In just seven years, you've gone from picking up a guitar to getting a record deal. What advice do you have for someone starting out in the business?
I'm a big believer in networking. Get out there, meet as many people as you can, and eventually something's gonna hit.

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EXPERIENCE PRS 2011

Premier Guitar journeys to the iconic guitar company's fifth-annual extravaganza in Stevensville, Maryland, to bring you news, photos, and video of the brand-new amps and guitars, as well as the weekend's lineup of killer activities.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS KIES AND JASON SHADRICK

Experience PRS 2011 activities included factory tours, artist and product-designer clinics, recording demos, Q&A sessions with founder/owner Paul Smith, concerts, and new product unveilings and demos.

During the event, attendees were able to explore nearly every inch of the PRS factory to see guitars and amps in various states of production. Here we see a handwired, 2-channel "H" amp during the final stages of wiring. The "H" refers the proprietary Heyboer output transformer.

In the amp demo room, PRS fans could put each SE and handwired model through its paces. To keep volume in check, each amp was set up with an isolation cab and headphones to play along with backing tracks performed by bassist Gary Grainger and drummer Greg Grainger.

The most-anticipated new products unveiled at Experience PRS 2011 were the new line of SE amps (the SE 50 is shown here). Each model is available as either a head or closed-back 1x12 combo, and all have two channels with separate EQs, an effects loop, and spring reverb.

For five years now, September has been a spot to mark on the calendar for hardcore fans of PRS guitars, basses, and amps. That's when the faithful with the means to make the pilgrimage trek to the 10-Top Mecca that is the company's headquarters in Stevensville, Maryland. Known as Experience PRS, the three-day open house/extravaganza regularly hosts a couple of thousand visitors—this year it was approximately 2,800—some traveling from as far away as Japan and Australia. The event's attendees include everyone from dealers to international distributers, recording artists, everyday guitar nuts, and members of the media. And what they get is practically an all-access experience with the products, people, and facilities from one of the three biggest guitar companies in the world. This year's Experience PRS activities included factory tours, artist and product-designer clinics, recording demos, Q&A sessions with founder/owner Paul Smith, concerts, and new-product unveilings and demos.

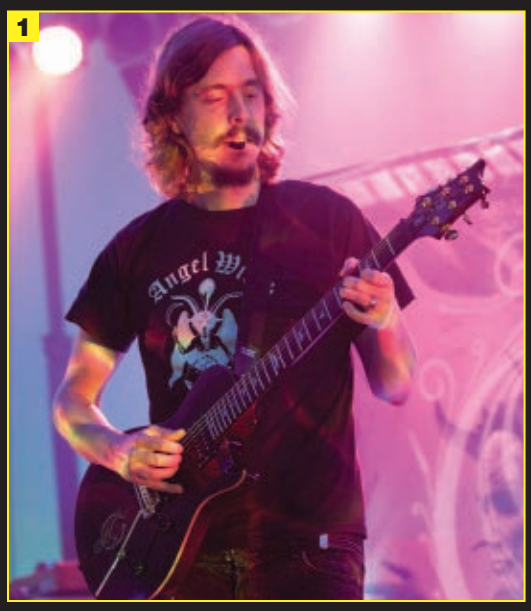
Perhaps the most exciting development this year was that PRS expanded the stable of its very popular (and accessibly priced) SE line to include amps. The all-tube SE 20, SE 30, and SE 50 models were designed by Doug Sewell, the same mastermind behind the company's higher-end handwired amps. The amps all have two channels with independent EQ sections, an effects loop, reverb, and custom-wound transformers. Their wattages correspond to their model names, and all are available as a head or a 1x12 combo. The SE 20 features a 6V6 power section, the SE 30 is driven by 5881s, and the SE 50 features a pair of EL34s. In addition, the SE line now includes SE Angelus Standard and SE Angelus Custom acoustics. Both feature a solid spruce top, laminated sides, and iconic PRS bird inlays, with the Standard having a solid mahogany back, and the Custom having a solid rosewood back.

Other products announced were the Stripped '58—a vintage-inspired single-cutaway with 57/08 pickups in a traditional, no-frills package—and the Swamp Ash Studio—a 22-fret model with a bridge 57/08 humbucker and two 57/08 Narrowfield pickups. At press time, both models were slated to be built only until October 14, 2011.

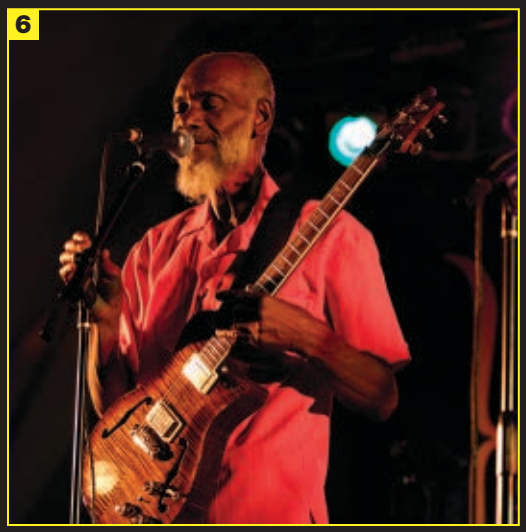
Among the new activities at Experience PRS this year was the "Why, Not How?" discussion between Paul Smith and his close friend and esteemed guitar author Tom Wheeler about their collective 21 rules of tone that are now implemented on all PRS models. (Smith said the full list is currently in a safe and will likely be burned when he dies.) Also, the company invited guests into its finish department, where 12 guitars were displayed to illustrate each step of the PRS V12 finishing process. Other new wrinkles to the PRS fest were the open guitar jams that put brave fans onstage with a backing band that included bassist Gary Grainger, drummer Greg Grainger, and guitarist Mike Ault.

In typical Experience PRS fashion, endorsees such as David Grissom, Al Di Meola, Ricky Skaggs, Tony McManus, Davy Knowles, Cody Kilby, Bernie Marsden, JD Bradshaw, and more were all over the company's campus, chatting and performing throughout the weekend. The gala closed with PRS SE Signature artists Fredrik Åkesson and Mike Åkerfeldt from multifaceted Swedish prog-metal band Opeth performing a 90-minute set.

For more video and photo highlights from Experience PRS 2011, visit premierguitar.com.



1. Mikael Åkerfeldt, frontman for Swedish prog-metal group Opeth, turned heads with his signature SE model as the band closed out the Saturday show. **2.** A few limited-edition electrics were introduced at Experience PRS. This is the "Stripped" 58 in an Eriza Verde finish. It has a maple top with a mahogany back and neck, 57/08 pickups, a 2-piece bridge, and Phase III locking tuners. Orders were only being accepted for this guitar until October 14, 2011. **3.** Based on the Studio model, the Swamp Ash Studio features 57/07 Narrowfield pickups in the middle and neck positions, with a 57/08 in the bridge. The swamp-ash body has a bolt-on, figured-maple neck with bird inlays. Orders were only being accepted until October 14, 2011. **4.** PRS also expanded its acoustic offerings with the new SE Angelus models. Both the Standard and Custom have solid spruce tops. The SE Angelus Standard has a solid mahogany back, laminated mahogany sides, and rosewood fretboard and bridge, while the Custom features a solid rosewood back, laminated rosewood sides, and ebony fretboard and bridge. **5.** Davy Knowles is shown here with "Ellie," his #1 guitar—which was previously Paul Smith's personal guitar. Knowles smiled as he told the crowd he "nicked it" from Smith. Ellie was a prototype made when the company first began work on the limited-edition Paul's 28 and Private Stock McCarty "Violin" guitars. **6.** Robert Lee Coleman, former guitarist for Percy Sledge and James Brown, was presented with a Hollowbody II by Paul Smith. It was the first guitar that had ever been given to Coleman, and he asked Smith to sign it to commemorate the occasion. **7.** A perennial favorite among the Experience PRS crowd, Texas guitar slinger David Grissom played an afternoon set with his signature DGT guitar. **8.** A few attendees were invited to jam with the PRS band during Friday night's show. Ben Greenspun, 16, jammed on a blues progression with an SC 58 plugged into a PRS MDT amp.



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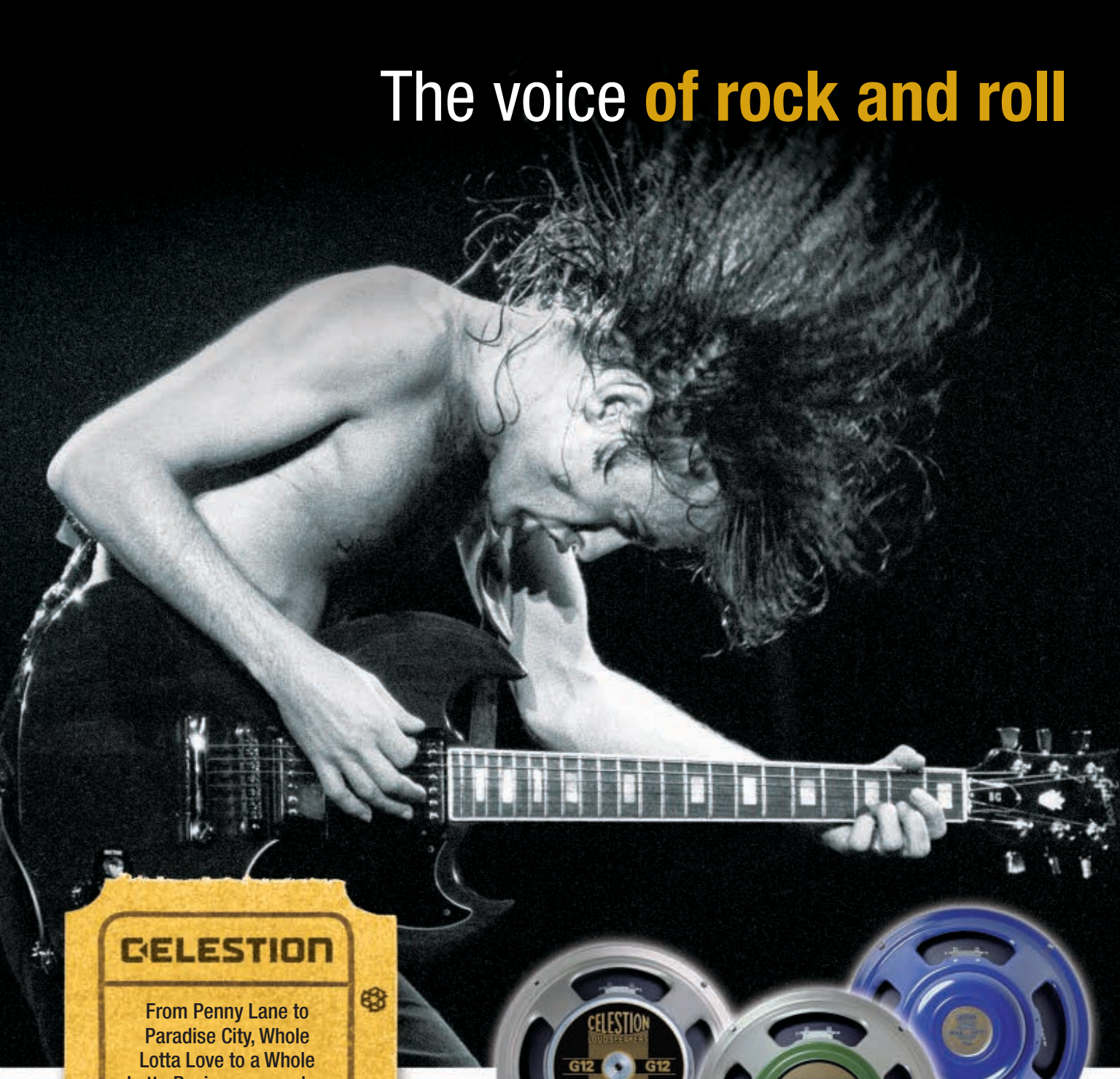

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Annie Clark at the September 13, 2011, record-release party for *Strange Mercy* in Hollywood. Photo by Danny Duarte

ALL-STAR DROPOUT

INDIE-ROCK RENAISSANCE WOMAN ANNIE CLARK—AKA ST. VINCENT—MUSES ABOUT HOW HER VINTAGE HARMONY BOBKAT, HER SILVERFACE PRINCETON REVERB, AND HAVING THE GUTS TO LEAVE BERKLEE JUMP-STARTED HER CAREER AND LANDED HER NEW ALBUM, *STRANGE MERCY*, AT NO. 19 ON THE US CHARTS.

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

It's pretty rare for a bona fide guitar-nut—we're talking Berklee College of Music-level guitar-a-holic—to rack up interviews on NPR, rave reviews from indie music mags like *NME* and *Pitchfork*, and guest appearances on the IFC's hit comedy *Portlandia*. But Annie Clark, the singer/guitarist who performs under the name St. Vincent, isn't your typical guitar geek. In fact, she's sort of a guitar hero for people who hate the whole idea of guitar-hero worship.

If that last statement—as well as the revelation that Clark dropped out of Berklee in her third year—inspires you to roll your eyes and start skipping to the next feature faster than you can mutter, "Oh, she's one of those artsy *'indie'* guitarists," you owe it to yourself to visit YouTube and check out her harmonically captivating and ultra-badass playing first. Go ahead—we'll wait (we've even pointed out some highlights for you in the "YouTube It" sidebar on p.126).

Back? Okay, now that you've witnessed Ms. Clark and her vintage Harmony Bobkat conjuring mesmerizing hammer-on riffs and corpulent 6-string glory, let's delve into the delicious details. Like how her uncle, Tuck Andress (from the jazz duo Tuck & Patti), inspired her to consider a career in music. Or how the multi-instrumentalist's love of harmony, Steely Dan, and Iron Maiden culminated in the rich compositional tapestry that has made this 29-year-old from Dallas, Texas, one of the most talked-about renaissance women in modern music. Or how her new album, *Strange Mercy*, was at No. 19 on the US charts at press time.

We recently spoke to Clark about all these things, as well as her reasons for quitting music school, her complex-yet-liberating MIDI-controlled pedalboard, and her thoughts on guitardom's gender issues.

I LEFT SCHOOL TO BE IN A ROCK BAND. I WAS JUST, LIKE, "I'M THROUGH STUDYING THIS THING." AND NO ONE HAS ASKED ME, *EVER*, TO SEE A COLLEGE DEGREE.

What first got you into playing guitar?
I was obsessed with it from a pretty young age. I was, like, 5 years old and saw *La Bamba*—the Ritchie Valens story—and I was captivated by that, and then I just started playing when I was 12. My uncle is an amazing guitar player, and we had some of his old guitars around. I was big into classic rock—Jethro Tull and these more guitar-y bands—and I thought, "I want to do that—I want to know how they're getting those sounds."

You probably get questions about Tuck all the time, but how instrumental was he in you getting hooked on guitar?
They were on tour *forever*—from, like, '88 to '96. So, he was this distant figure who I didn't see very often but who was a famous musician. I'd see him *maybe* once every two years, but I think even just having his spectral presence around was really powerful, because I saw him and thought, "Oh, *I* could do that."

Who were some of the first guitarists that you remember *really* getting into?
Probably the really obvious ones—Hendrix … the Doors … I really liked Jethro Tull … I really, really, really loved Steely Dan. To have that kind of harmony in your ears from a really young age—I mean, Steely Dan was my favorite band from age 8 until … well, I just saw them two nights ago here in New York!

Were you more into the bands as a whole or the guitar playing?
I was into the bands as a whole. I was really into lyrics and melodies. But some of the solos on the Steely Dan records are rock-solid. Denny Dias and Larry Carlton … that stuff is great.

You eventually went to Berklee College of Music. Did you study in the guitar program?
Yes, I was a guitar major.

Even though you left after three years, how important would you say that whole experience—the studying, the interaction, and the stepping away from it—were to your journey as a musician and songwriter?
I think I got a bit more knowledge of harmony—or at least I could put names to the harmonies that I already had in my ears. But the way in which an institution can teach art is not necessarily the way I like to experience art. I mean, they have to do things like have grades and have this codified way of experiencing things, and that's not the whole picture. A lot of people can get caught up in getting the best scores on a guitar exam, and they can be technically very good guitar players or instrumentalists, but there's a difference between athleticism and artistry. The best place is where those two things can really meet. But the school can't teach you anything about how to be an artist—they can teach you how to be an athlete. School inadvertently made everything competitive, and made music—which is so powerful and so joyful—completely analytical. That's not how I want to experience it, and that's not how I want to *make* it, either. I *can* go there, but it's not that fun.

So you felt like they were making you study the soul out of the music?
Yeah. They're not going to have a class on the soul of music. But, actually, I *would* go to school if there were some kind of cosmological class—like, "The universe resonates on a B♭." That would be amazing to me. Or, something about, like, the first sound in the universe being very low, but if you pitch it up many, many octaves, it would be a root pitch with some other note that's in between major and minor. If there was something like *that*, that would be powerful.

Despite what you've said about formal music education, are you glad you went to Berklee? And was there a final straw that made you say, "That's it—I'm out of here"?
[*Long pause.*] No, I left school to be in a rock band. I was just, like, "I'm through studying this thing." And no one has asked me, *ever*, to see a college degree.

Like, "Let me make sure you're *qualified* to play this club … "
[*Laughs.*] *Exactly*. It's like, "That guitar sounds pretty good, but … I don't know—there's no diploma attached to it."

But do you feel like it changed you as a player, even if you felt their priorities were in the wrong place?
I got some new things under my fingers. It wasn't a wholly bad experience, but they're in a tricky position: They're teaching a music industry that is changing every second—and that *massively* changed in the early 2000s with the internet and the fact that it's harder to monetize a record. So they're in this position where they're, like, "Here, kids, come on in—go into debt to go to this school that's going to teach you the secrets of how to make it in the music industry." But the only way to make it in the industry is just to go out there and do it—because it's changing every second. [Secondary music education] is very much steeped in this major-label model. I signed to an indie label, and [schools] don't really account for that in their Music Business 101 classes, or whatever. They don't account for the fact that barely any of us will go out there, sign to a major label, and get hundreds of thousands of dollars for our first record. That's not where I was, and that's not where I wanted to be. That's what they're selling, though—how to go out there and make it on a major label. That's a way to do it, but the statistics are stacked against you.

Because your music is very indie, it's kind of surprising that you studied in a formal guitar program. Do you still think in terms of theory when you play?
Not really. If I needed to communicate with somebody—like, "No, I'm sorry, this chord is actually an E♭m(♭9) chord"—I could tell them that.

But you're not worrying about stuff like, "Oh, *this* scale can't go with that chord …"
No, it's all by intuition and all by ear.

Let's talk about the new album. How did you get those distorted sounds with a really sharp attack on "Cruel"—they sound almost like a guitar turned into a keyboard?
That's my '67 Harmony Bobkat with two gold-foil pickups and a Death by Audio Interstellar Overdriver Deluxe through a late-'70s silverface Fender Princeton Reverb.

The fuzzy solo in that song is somehow otherworldly and raw *and* beautiful. Was that off the cuff?

Clark with her three-pickup Silvertone 1488 Silhouette at a February 2010 date at the 9:30 Club in Washington, DC. Photo by Brandon Wu

Yeah. I just played the melody of the chorus lines, and I used a Boss Super Shifter to get that [*hums*] *rrrun-rrrun-rrrun*—that *portamento* thing.

How many guitar layers are you using there?
I double-tracked the [*sings chorus riff*] *duh-duh-dut duh-duh-duh, duh-duh-dut duh-duh-dut duh-duh dut dut dut* parts and the part that mimics the vocal melody, and then I was like, "What would Frank Black do—what would the Pixies do in this song?"

Do riffs like those come to you when you first write a song, or do they come up later as you're developing a song in the studio?
Well, what I did for this album is I wrote very simple songs, first and foremost, and then I just kept this arsenal of riffs on hand. I wasn't [initially] worried about, like, "Oh, what will the riff in this song be?" but I knew there had to be some kind of riff. So I basically have a scrapbook of riffs, and then once I had a song written, I would mosey over to the scrapbook and go, "Oh, *this* will work—let's put this on here."

You play a lot of instruments. Do you usually write on guitar, piano, or something else?
I wrote my last record, *Actor*, completely in a box—I wrote it in GarageBand. In some cases, I just drew in notes with my mouse. I didn't touch any instruments to make it—which was a *long* process. With this record, I went back to my roots and wrote on guitar. Just simple songs on guitar.

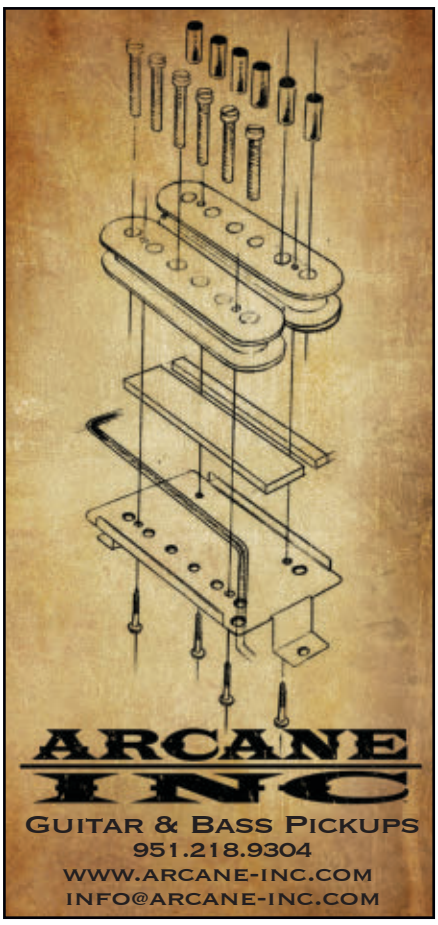
Just chord progressions first?
Yeah. I'm kind of impatient and I want to hear the whole product when I start, but I just forced myself to keep it very barebones with the chords and everything.

You play the Harmony Bobkat and the similar Silvertone 1488 a lot—what drew you to them?
What drew me to them is part practical and part aesthetic. One, they're really light. I'm a pretty small person and, even though I love the sustain of a Les Paul, three songs into a set, my back hurts because it's too heavy. I know that was the

thing in the ’70s—the heavier the guitar, the longer the sustain—but I just can’t do that. But also, the Bobkat and Silvertone have this amazing vibrato bar that’s super sensitive—you can dive bomb on it and it will stay in tune. The neck is not the most hospitable—it leaves a little something to be desired—but they’re really solid guitars. I like the tone, and it’s really balanced—and I *really* love that vibrato bar.

Do you have any special tricks you have to use to keep it in tune?
It works pretty well. I tune down a whole-step and use a little heavier strings, and that keeps it in tune a little bit better. On “Year of the Tiger,” I actually do a super-metal tuning—down to a low F♯, super sludgy and slimy—with .012-gauge strings and a .054 on the bottom.

What’s going on with those robotic chord stabs in “Neutered Fruit”?
I really mostly played the Bobkat with that Death by Audio Interstellar Overdriver Deluxe through the Princeton.



YouTube It

To see and hear Annie Clark's gorgeous vocals and deliciously quirky guitar work in action, check out the following clips on YouTube.com.

With her Harmony, Silvertone, Music Man bass amp, and pedalboard in full view, Clark straps on her Hagstrom Super Swede and leads her band through the new tune "Surgeon" at New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. BONUS: She replaces the studio version's closing synth solo with a jazz-rock guitar freak-out.
YouTube search term: St. Vincent – Surgeon (Live HQ)

At the 2005 All Points West festival in New York, Clark begins by launching into a Hendrix-inspired "Star-Spangled Banner," stops and says, "Just kidding," and then dives into an amazingly bluesy version of the Beatles' "Dig a Pony."
YouTube search term: St Vincent - Dig A Pony - Live @ All Points West Festival 8/1/09 in HD

In this 2009 studio performance for Lake Fever Sessions, it's just Clark, an Epiphone Masterbilt slope-shouldered dreadnought, and a couple of fantastic mics capturing her lovely voice and deft fingerstyle work.
YouTube search term: St. Vincent - The Strangers [live on Lake Fever Sessions]

So that's pretty much your whole rig?
Live, I have this *bonkers* pedalboard that's MIDI controlled—because I was spending so much time not even performing, just making sure I was hitting the right pedals at the right time. So I went to this guy named Mike Vegas, who has a pedalboard company called Nice Rack here in New York, and I had a pedalboard custom built that syncs up MIDI with my keyboard player—who's running Ableton Live. I have to program it, but it sends MIDI commands to change my sonic parameters on different cues. I don't even have to touch the pedalboard anymore—it's *amazing*!

What's on that 'board?
I have an Eventide Space, an Eventide PitchFactor, the Death by Audio Interstellar Overdriver Deluxe, the Boss Super Shifter, and a Z.Vex Mastotron fuzz.

Which MIDI interface are you using?
An RJM Mini Effect Gizmo and an RJM MasterMind.

What about other guitars and amps?
Right now I have two of the Harmony Bobkats, and then I have a 1979

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Hagstrom Super Swede—which plays *really* well. Those are my three touring guitars this time out. I've been playing through a Music Man bass amp from the '80s that has a lot of really specific EQ controls—like, 1.6 kHz or 510 Hz—which I really like.

Are you using that in addition to the Princeton?
No, I use the Princeton in the studio, and I've been using the Music Man live. But I may switch that up. The Music Man has a limiter in it that you can turn on and off, but I feel like it's on no matter what—which is *not* good. [Ed note: At press time, Clark had switched from the Music Man to two handwired TRVR amps for live playing. See the "Annie Clark's Gearbox" sidebar on p.130 for details.]

We're running this article in our annual pedal issue, so I wondered if you could talk a little about your philosophy on getting interesting sounds?
I think probably the best distortion still is overdriving a tube amp, or—in the studio—going straight into the console and getting board distortion. That's a very satisfying distortion. But if you're touring and you need to be practical and you have to have a lot of different colors in your guitar palette, you probably shouldn't just bring, like, a Fender tweed amp for a great overdrive sound—that's just not going to happen.

You mean because it's too limited, tonally?
Just logistically. Even if it's my ideal sound, in my current configuration I'd need a pedalboard that could switch between two amps *on a dime*. Y'know, it's like, "Okay, here's the distorted part, but the chorus is really clean, so I've got to go over here." It's just tricky.

So the main reason you're using the Music Man is for clean headroom, and then you can use pedals for your distortion.
Exactly. As far as the effects philosophy … in my former years, I was traveling with a pedalboard that was huge. It had Moogerfoogers and I was controlling them with expression pedals, and I had two or three distortions, and this and that and the other, but I've come around to having a fuzz and a distortion, and then a lot of flexibility in a couple other pedals. The Eventide pedals are really great for that,

Clark digs in on her go-to 1967 Harmony H15V Bobkat at a 2009 gig at the El Rey Theatre in Los Angeles. Photo by Lindsey Best

… THE [1967 HARMONY] BOBKAT HAS THIS AMAZING VIBRATO BAR THAT'S SUPER SENSITIVE–YOU CAN DIVE BOMB ON IT AND IT WILL STAY IN TUNE.

in terms of how much space they take up versus what they can give you. I really like them because, if you're not needing to travel with rack gear—like the Edge or something—you can get a *whole* lot of mileage out of these pedals that don't take that much space on your pedalboard.

I have to be careful how I say this, because it could come across the wrong way, but one thing that's interesting about your work is that very few singer-songwriters are brave enough to put an off-the-wall riff or solo into a song with commercial appeal like you do. And it's notable for a couple of reasons: First, you're writing these songs *and* playing the riffs and solos yourself. Second, for whatever reason, it seems that on the whole, women who play guitar are less likely to get into the type of tone alchemy and adventurous riffery that you do. Why do you think that is?
I think the idea of women being virtuosos at an instrument is really not new at all. If you look at classical music, there are tons and tons of really technical, virtuosic women.

That's totally true. But I don't mean in a virtuosic sense—I'm talking more about the visceral approach you have. In "indie" music it's certainly more common, but across the wider musical field it doesn't seem like it's there as much with women who play guitar. I don't know if it has anything to do with gender or not, but I do know that, for instance, women are a lot less likely to read a guitar website or subscribe to a guitar magazine that focuses on those things.
Rather than talking in really tricky generalizations that get really hairy, really fast, I just

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know my experience—which is that I *loved* Iron Maiden. I still love Iron Maiden. I just loved *guitar*, and I never really was made aware of the fact that some people think it's an anomaly for a woman to really play guitar. I mean, you have people like Marnie Stern—who's amazing … a crazy, crazy shredder—and Merrill Garbus from tUnE-yArDs, who's a *great* guitar player … there are a lot of women who can really play—even going back to Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Absolutely—she was the inspiration for our new Forgotten Heroes feature series. But there's no denying that, for some reason, it seems guys are more often hyper-focused on guitar—probably *too* focused. Maybe it's a cultural thing.
Obviously it's not that women are at a handicap with motor skills … it must be a cultural thing.

It's certainly not a motor-skill thing. But don't you ever wonder why there aren't more women getting *really* into guitar?
I grew up loving Kim and Kelley Deal from the Breeders, and Sleater-Kinney. If you look for it, there are definitely women playing guitar. I was actually laughing with a friend of mine who was the guitar player in a successful band in the '90s and 2000s—please don't take this the wrong way—and we were kind of commiserating about getting asked the "women in rock" question. When people ask what it's like being a woman in rock, we were like, "The only difference for us is we get asked what it's like to be a woman in rock." [*Laughs.*] It's just natural—this is what I do. The only times you are made aware of your gender is when people make you aware of your gender. You know? Again, you are being incredibly tactful and I'm not taking offense at anything you're asking, but I just wanted to point that out.

And I knew I was taking a risk by asking, but I had to because I love how players like you balance being totally geeked-out on guitar with an attitude of "Screw all the technical stuff—I'm just going to make badass music." There are so many of us guys who play guitar who can't see the forest for the trees—we're so focused on playing technically "good" guitar and having the right gear that it's almost the musical equivalent of what you were talking about with formal music education: There's no soul in it, and there's so much worry about the machismo—or whatever it is—that it's not even exciting anymore. So I just wondered if you felt like there was something about how women in Western culture approach music that somehow makes them more fresh on the guitar—because, by and large, they're *not* approaching it that way, y'know?
Well, it's an interesting conversation. I don't approach guitar like an ego thing—like, "I'm going to play faster than somebody else." I'm not that interested in that athletic aspect.

Neither am I, but sometimes it seems like it's an epidemic among a lot of male guitarists.
That's the difference between being an athlete and being an artist, and it's great when those things can combine. That's the ideal—to make something that's musically viable also emotionally compelling. That's the happy medium. But it's a good question. I was having a conversation with a drummer friend of mine, and he was saying, "Y'know, if I really am honest, I think I started playing drums because somewhere in my reptile brain I knew I would have a sexual competitive advantage if I was good at music." So I'm sure there's something in there for everybody—some kind of evolutionary thing.

loripaulson.com

Alternating between quirkily sultry vocals, bouts of fuzzed-out mayhem, and jazzy lines, Clark is always in control. Photo by Lori Paulson

ANNIE CLARK'S GEARBOX

GUITARS
1967 Harmony H15V Bobkat, '60s Silvertone 1488 Silhouette, 1979 Hagstrom Super Swede, Fender Deluxe Nashville Tele, Epiphone Masterbilt slope-shoulder dreadnought

AMPS
Late-'70s Fender Princeton Reverb (studio), TRVR Little Boy blackface Deluxe Reverb clone (live), TRVR Trinity 1x10 (live)

EFFECTS
Death by Audio Interstellar Overdriver Deluxe, Boss PS-5 Super Shifter, Eventide Space, Eventide PitchFactor, Z.Vex Mastotron

STRINGS, PICKS, AND ACCESSORIES
Ernie Ball .010 and .012 sets, Fender medium picks, Nice Rack NYC cables, Voodoo Lab Pedal Power, RJM Mini Effect Gizmo, RJM MasterMind

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THE GUITAR COLLECTION

AN UP-CLOSE AND INTIMATE LOOK AT SIX HISTORIC INSTRUMENTS PROFILED IN EPIC INK'S LAVISH NEW BOOK *THE GUITAR COLLECTION*.

It's not often you hear about a $1500 book filled with 670 huge, luscious images of the most iconic guitars ever—*instruments like Jeff Beck's 1954 Fender Esquire, Hank Williams' 1944 Martin D-28, and Rick Nielsen's checkered 5-neck Hamer. A truly epic read,* The Guitar Collection *features 512 pages of quality, 23" x 11.25" paper, weighs 20 pounds, and comes in a custom leather case that would look at home right next to the resting place for a boutique solidbody. Epic Ink graciously granted* Premier Guitar *permission to reprint the following excerpts of six tantalizing and historically significant instruments from the new tome. Enjoy!*

STRADIVARIUS, "THE RAWLINS"

| FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSIC MUSEUM, THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA, VERMILLION |

MADE IN **1700**

The most celebrated violin maker of all time, Antonio Stradivari of Cremona, Italy, made at least four guitars. Unlike the violin, which reached its pinnacle of design in Stradivari's hands, the guitar was only midway through its evolutionary journey in 1700, when this Stradivarius guitar was built.

The Rawlins, named for the benefactors who acquired it for the National Music Museum, has an ancestral relation to the lute that is apparent in this instrument's courses of paired strings—a configuration that would prevail on the modern mandolin but would disappear on the guitar around 1800. However, the hourglass body shape, with a waist delineating upper and lower bouts, distinguished even the earliest guitars of the mid 1500s from the pear-shaped lute.

Like virtually all Stradivarius violins, this guitar has been modified. The embedded ebony frets are highly suspect in an era when guitars typically had tied-on gut frets, and these frets are not in the correct positions. The scale length of more than 29 inches is so long that gut strings would break before they could be tuned up to standard pitch.

The prominent name and date on the back of the headstock, the too-long scale, and the misplaced frets suggest that this instrument may have been made to showcase Stradivari's artisanship rather than to be played.

"THE LOG"

| FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM |

MADE CIRCA **1941** AND PLAYED BY **LES PAUL**

By the 1940s, Les Paul was one of the most famous acoustic guitarists in America, but with this homemade guitar, nicknamed the Log, he became one of the earliest—and best-known—proponents of the solidbody electric guitar.

An inveterate tinkerer and experimenter, Paul knew that a thicker guitar top would sustain string vibrations longer and provide a more brilliant tone—two qualities that perfectly suited his lightning-fast playing style. In 1941, he took the concept to the extreme and built this guitar around a 4-inch-by-4-inch slab of pine wood.

The Log looks like a standard hollowbody archtop, and the body wings did in fact come from an Epiphone guitar. The neck has the inlay pattern of the Chicago-based Larson Brothers, with a later headstock overlay from a Gibson. The vibrato and the wood-covered pickups were handmade by Paul.

Paul would start a performance with the sides attached to the center block. Once the audience had accepted the sound of the instrument, he removed the wings to reveal the solid center. Although it was a gimmick, this guitar gave Paul an unforgettable association with the solidbody electric guitar that led to his lucrative endorsement deal with Gibson.

Custom
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GIBSON ES-355 "LUCILLE"

| FROM THE COLLECTION OF HARD ROCK INTERNATIONAL |

MADE IN **1962** AND PLAYED BY **B.B. KING**

Throughout the 1950s, B.B. King's Lucille—the name he gave all of his guitars—was a hollowbody Gibson, but at the turn of the decade he switched to Gibson's innovative new semi-hollowbody designs. He eventually embraced the ES-355 exclusively.

Gibson's ES-335, ES-345, and ES-355 had identical construction, with a solid block running down the center of the body to minimize feedback. It appears King's choice of the ES-355 was based entirely on the expensive look of its large pearl block inlays and multi-ply binding. He didn't use the ES-355's stereo capability (as indicated by "Stereo" on the truss-rod cover). He turned the "chicken-head" knob of the Vari-Tone control, which provided a progressive filter of midrange tones, to its minimum setting; when he got his own Gibson signature model, he added a "0" position so the control could be bypassed. He removed the original vibrato entirely—the plugged screw holes are still visible in the top—and added a stop-bar tailpiece, which provided more sustain.

The weathered finish and the worn gold plating on the pickup covers and bridge of this, King's first ES-355, attest to its constant use. King retired this "Lucille" in 1967 and gave it to Chicago bluesman Elvin Bishop, but he has continued to play Gibson ES-355s for the rest of his career.

FENDER STRATOCASTER "NUMBER ONE"

| FROM THE COLLECTION OF JIMMIE VAUGHAN |

MADE IN **1962** AND PLAYED BY **STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN**

In 1973, an aspiring blues guitarist named Stevie Ray Vaughan went into the Heart of Texas music store in Austin and bought a used Fender Stratocaster. As the wear and tear on this guitar suggests, its nickname, Number One, is well deserved. As Vaughan became the most famous and influential blues guitarist of his generation, this guitar was truly his favorite.

Vaughan replaced the original three-ply white pickguard with a black unit and added his initials, "SRV," with stick-on letters. He put more permanent proof of his ownership on the back, carving "SR Vaughan" in the wood. The vibrato bridge is a left-handed gold-plated unit because it was the only one available in the guitar store on the day Vaughan needed a replacement.

As the remnants of finish indicate, this guitar had a standard three-tone sunburst finish. Due to constant use, the fingerboard was planed and refretted a number of times, and eventually Vaughan replaced the neck with one from another of his Strats.

After Vaughan's death in a helicopter crash following a concert in 1990, his older brother, Jimmie, reinstalled the original neck on Number One. In 2004, Fender honored Vaughan by replicating Number One in a limited run of 100.

FENDER STRATOCASTER

| FROM THE COLLECTION OF EXPERIENCE MUSIC PROJECT |

MADE IN **1968** AND PLAYED BY **JIMI HENDRIX** AT WOODSTOCK

No guitar represents a greater convergence of artist, event, and instrument than this 1968 Fender Stratocaster played by Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock.

Taken alone, the instrument is rather unremarkable. For starters, it was made during CBS's ownership of Fender, a period of declining quality. It's a stock right-handed Stratocaster with Olympic White finish. Although the maple fingerboard appears to be integral with the neck, as it was on 1950s Fenders, it is actually separate; the giveaway is on the back of the neck, where there is no evidence of the walnut "skunk stripe" that is present on all Fender one-piece necks. Hendrix played left-handed, but rather than special-ordering a lefty, he simply flipped the guitar over and reversed the strings, so that the heavier bass strings would be on what is normally the treble side.

Although the Strat had some degree of notoriety in rock and roll music, thanks to Buddy Holly and the surf bands, it was overshadowed in the Fender line in the early to mid 1960s by the more expensive Jazzmaster.

The film *Woodstock* featured Hendrix's screaming, pyrotechnic version of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which set the course for the future of rock guitar and instantly raised the Stratocaster to the iconic status that it enjoys today.

ALEMBIC EXPLOITER SPYDER BASS

| FROM THE COLLECTION OF HARD ROCK INTERNATIONAL |

MADE IN **1980** AND PLAYED BY **JOHN ENTWISTLE**

Alembic was founded in 1969 as an electronics consulting company but quickly gained a reputation for creating high-end basses. Alembic's active electronics and exotic woods attracted the attention of the Who's John Entwistle, who ordered the first of many custom Alembics in 1974.

In 1977, Entwistle came up with a design based on the Gibson Futura, a prototype for Gibson's 1958 Explorer. Entwistle acknowledged the Explorer connection by calling his model the Exploiter. The inlaid sterling-silver spider webs also inspired the name Spyder. Entwistle had a number of basses made with this design. This one, sporting maple and walnut body woods and a zebrawood headstock overlay, was made in 1980, just in time for Entwistle to pose with it for the cover photo of his 1981 solo album, *Too Late the Hero*.

The five-prong microphone jack (located next to the bridge) provided a direct input to a recording studio board, but it required a transformer for use with a standard bass amplifier. This inconvenience, along with the basses' instability under the climate variations that are unavoidable on tour, caused Entwistle to abandon Alembics as his main stage basses in 1985. He maintained a close relationship with the company, however, and was working with Alembic on a special edition of the Spyder when he died in 2002.

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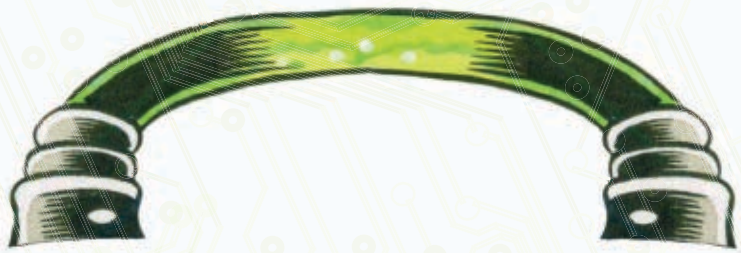

PEDAL MANIA

All right, stompbox psychos—here's what you've been waiting for all year. No matter what your tastes, you'll find plenty in the following pages to keep you busy for a *long* time. Enjoy!

LESSON: HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM YOUR DELAY PEDAL 140
HISTORY OF THE TUBE SCREAMER 150
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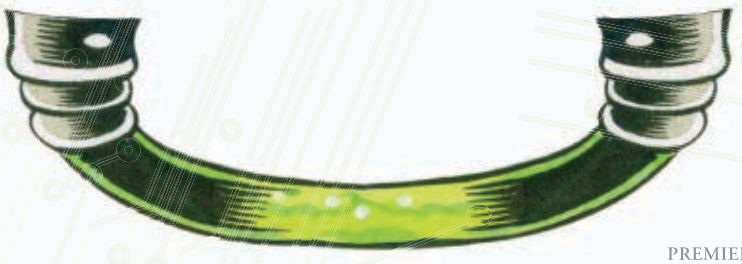


HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DELAY PEDAL

Whether you've got a barebones analog box or a feature-packed digital model, your delay can do a lot more than add ambience to your sound. Here we walk you through everything from basics like signal-chain placement and dialing in traditional sounds to looping and precise tempo matching.

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Delay pedals are among the most popular effects around, and the reason is simple: A delay pedal not only gives your sound a professional sheen and adds a three-dimensional quality—even when set for a discreet, atmospheric effect—but it can also produce a wide variety of not-so-subtle sounds and textures, ranging from ear-twisting rhythmic repeats (à la Eddie Van Halen's "Cathedral") to faux twin-guitar harmonies and live looping.

This how-to guide will cover the aforementioned effects, as well as fundamentals like the function of typical delay controls, and where to place your unit in an effects chain. Although there are countless delays on the market—many of which have mind-boggling features—we're going to use a basic delay pedal setup similar to what you'll find on a Boss DD-7 as our reference point. We've also provided some sample settings so you can get the most out of your delay pedal right away.

Though there's a plethora of delay pedals on the market, the control scheme on a Boss DD-7 is very common.

Delay Pedal Controls

Three controls are common to virtually all delay units: Time, Feedback (sometimes labeled "Repeat" or "Regeneration"), and Level (or "Mix").

Time controls the length of time between any two repetitions of your signal. It is most often measured in milliseconds (ms). Most delay pedals don't have a delay-time readout that would enable you to determine exact delay times in milliseconds, so you typically just adjust the Time knob to get an approximate time based on the unit's available range. For instance, the Boss DD-7 (street $179) has a Mode knob that selects between four time ranges—up to 50 ms, 51–200 ms, 201–800 ms, and 801–3200 ms—and the Time knob then adjusts the setting within the selected range.

Feedback determines the amount of repetitions. At its minimum setting, Feedback outputs a single repetition of the

original signal. From that point on, as you turn up Feedback you get more repeats. Some delay units allow infinite repeats when this control is maxed.

Level controls the volume of the repeats. When Level is at its minimum setting, you won't hear any repeats. When it's all the way up, the repeats should be as loud as the original signal.

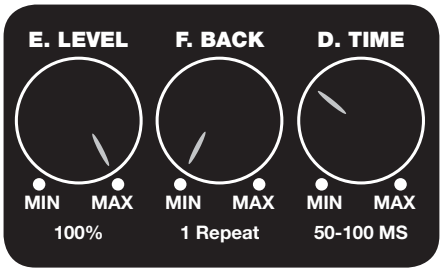
Signal-Chain Placement

If you plan to use your delay in conjunction with other stompboxes, it's important to consider where to place these effects in the chain—especially if you're using an overdrive, distortion, or fuzz pedal. The most common setup is to place dirt before delay. This is important because it means you'll be delaying the distorted signal as opposed to distorting a delayed signal, which will sound mushy and indistinct. Because a distortion pedal has the strongest impact on your fundamental tone, it's typically placed early in the chain, whereas delay is usually placed toward the end of the chain so it can produce repeats of all of the effects added to your guitar sound. Of course, you should experiment for yourself to see what you prefer.

If you're taking the dirt-before-delay route and are planning on using delay live with the distortion from your amp, then you'll want to insert your delay into your amp's effects loop (if it has one) so that it comes in the chain after the preamp gain. For recording, it's less of an issue because you can just record the amp without any effects and then add delay during post-production.

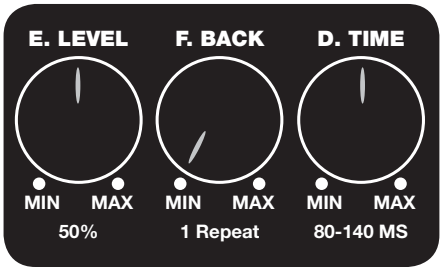
Doubling and Modulation

The term "doubling" refers to the process of using a subtle delay to thicken your sound. To get a doubling effect, set Time between 50 and 100 ms, Feedback for minimal repeats (one or two), and Level all the way up. Because the repeat happens so quickly, it creates the illusion of another guitar playing in unison with the original signal rather than sounding like an echo. If you use a lower delay time (20 to 50 ms), you can also get pseudo chorusing and flanging sounds.



Slapback Echo

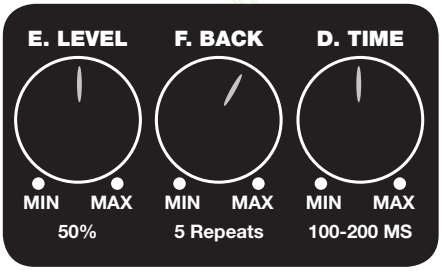
Slapback is a single short repeat similar to a tape slap (the time delay between the record and play heads in an analog tape recorder), and it is most often heard in rockabilly and country. To achieve a slapback effect, keep the Time short (between 80–140 ms),



Feedback at 0 (so you only get one repeat), and Level at about 50 percent.

Faux Reverb

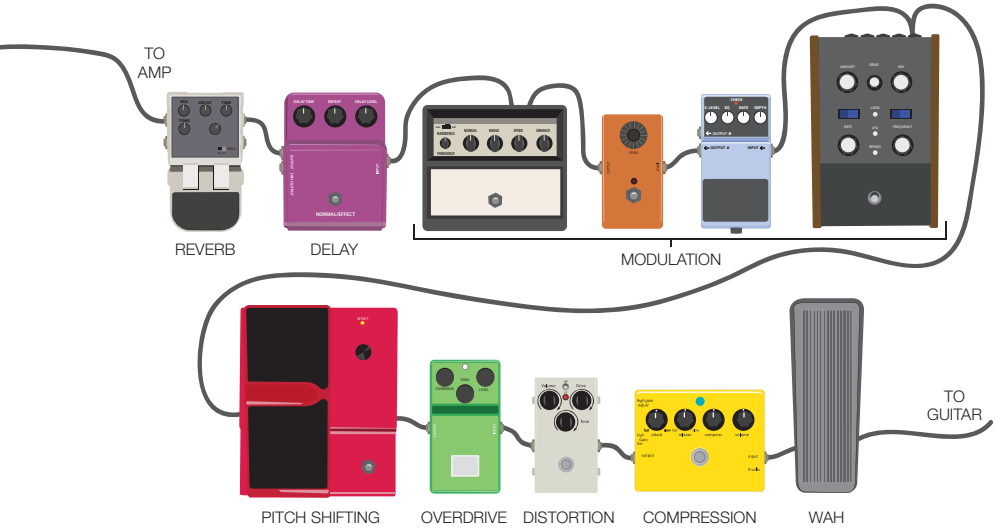
A reverb-type effect can be achieved by modifying some of the settings used for slapback. Set the Time between 100 and 200 ms, Feedback for about 5 repeats, and Level at about 50 percent.



Tempo Matching

Most delay pedals do not have precise delay time readings on their knob panels. This isn't a crucial issue when you're using shorter delay times or when precise timing of the repeats is not integral to the performance. However, if you're playing to a fixed beat source (say, a band or rhythm track) with a delay time of more than 200 ms and a fairly high Level setting that gives the repeats a distinct note, it will sound best if you dial in a precise delay time that matches the tempo of the band or rhythm track. Otherwise, the repeats will be out of time against the underlying beat. If your music is delay based, delay pedals such as the Providence DLY-4 Chrono Delay (street $449, reviewed on p. 216), TC Electronic ND-1 Nova Delay (street $259), and Strymon Timeline (street $449, reviewed on p.212)—all of which feature LED readouts of the delay time—are worth considering.

Many delay pedals from the last decade or so offer a happy middle ground with tap-tempo functionality (some designs require using an aftermarket external footswitch to access this). If you're familiar with the term but aren't quite sure exactly how it works, here's the scoop: Though many players don't know the exact tempo they need in terms of beats per minute (bpm), most have an innate sense of the tempo they wish to play at, so tapping it out on a delay pedal's tap-tempo footswitch is an easy way to get the sort of tempo matching we've been talking about. If your delay doesn't have tap-tempo functionality, or if you want a formulaic approach to calculating the



Newer digital delays such as the Providence DLY-4 Chrono Delay, TC Electronic ND-1 Nova Delay, and Strymon Timeline feature exact millisecond readouts for players who need very precise delays for tempo-matching purposes.

delay time, see the "Calculating MS from BPM" sidebar on p. 146.

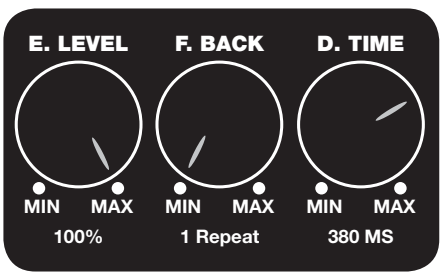
Dotted-Eighth Rhythmic Repeats

Guitarists like Eddie Van Halen, the Edge, and David Gilmour took delays to new heights by making them an integral part of compositions like Van Halen's "Cathedral," U2's "Where the Streets have No Name," and Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall, Part 1." They popularized a trick using dotted-eighth-note delay repeats to create the illusion that they were playing more notes—and faster—than they really were.

Delays such as the Line 6 Echo Park feature dotted-eighth-note modes that make it a cinch to create rhythmic parts in the style of U2's the Edge or Pink Floyd's David Gilmour.

To do this, set your delay to repeat everything you play a dotted-eighth-note (three 16ths) after you play the original note, and then pluck continuous eighth-notes. After the delay's initial entrance on the last 16th of the first beat, it will fill in the second and fourth 16th-note of every successive beat—as long as you continue to play eighth-notes (newly picked notes will cover the first and third 16th of every beat). To make this sound as natural as possible, set your delay pedal's Level knob all the way up so it matches the volume of the original signal, and try to keep the notes as precise and short as you can to avoid having a picked note overlap with a delayed note.

Some delays, such as the Line 6 Echo Park, have rhythmic subdivision modes built in, so dotted-eighth repeats won't be a problem to set up. However, if your delay doesn't offer subdivisions, you'll have to do some math to get the Time setting right. Here, again, the "Calculating MS from BPM" sidebar will be a big help.



Delay as Harmonizer

If you want to play twin-guitar harmony parts à la Iron Maiden or the Allman Brothers but are the only guitarist in your band, you can use a delay to create a similar feel. This tends to work best when you're playing parts that are pre-composed rather than improvised, because the harmony line has to match the contour and rhythm of the original line. Unless you have a flawless, photographic memory and can recall and harmonize improvised passages in real time, it's very difficult to do off the cuff. You'll have more luck with worked-out phrases that are rhythmically consistent and predictable, like the repeating, arpeggiated climax to the solo in the Eagles' "Hotel California." This type of simple figure is easier to follow and harmonize than something rhythmically complex, too.

One caveat with using a delay to perform harmonized lines is that you won't be able to easily start both parts simultaneously. You might try using a volume pedal to mute the opening line and bring the volume up when the harmony begins, but the more common approach is to just start a line and opt for a staggered entrance of

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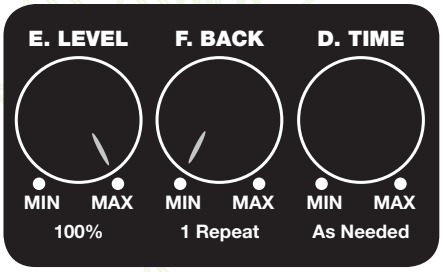
the harmony line. In fact, some songs were written with staggered harmony parts. For instance, the intro to Iron Maiden's "The Trooper" has a built-in layered entrance of a harmonized line and can be pulled off by a single guitarist using a delay pedal.

If you're new to harmonizing, here's a quick overview on creating harmony parts. Typically, the intervals of a harmony part are fixed (i.e., the part uses the same interval, shifting between its major or minor form to accommodate diatonic notes) throughout the duration of the line, with thirds and sixths being the most common choices (although fourths, fifths, and octaves are also frequently employed). Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, and different intervals can be used throughout a line. For a more in-depth exploration of harmonized lines, consult a book such as *A Player's Guide to Chords and Harmony: Music Theory for Real-World Musicians* by Jim Aikin or *David Baker's Arranging and Composing for the Small Ensemble: Jazz, R&B, Jazz Rock*, an advanced workbook with a forward by Quincy Jones.



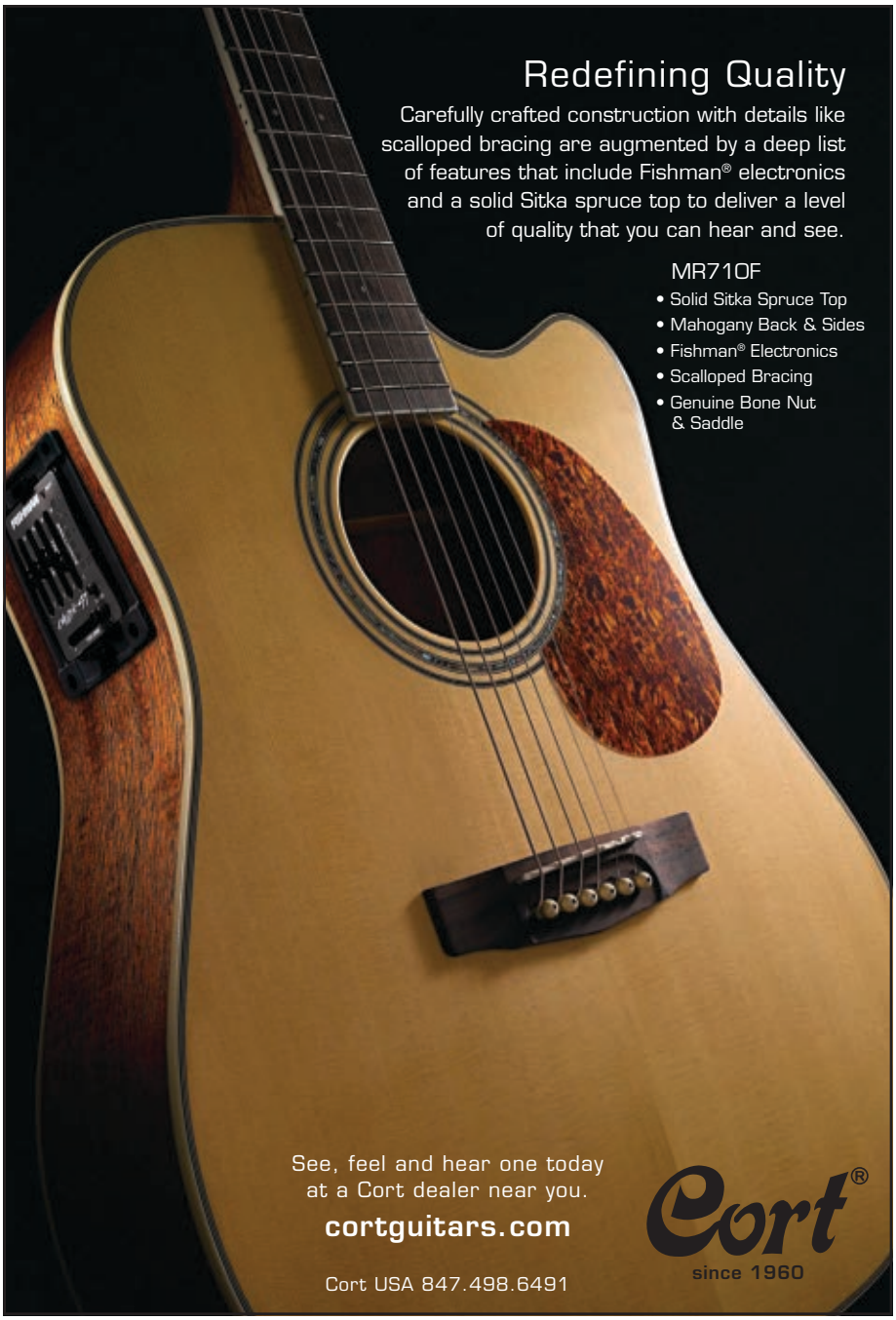
Independent/Counterpoint Melodies

If you're really adventurous, you can take the staggered harmonized line idea we just discussed and use it to play something contrapuntal, like a "canon" or a "round." In other words, soon after a melody starts, it is imitated by another voice. In this case, the other voice would be from your delay. To get this technique under your belt, you might try playing simple, familiar pieces like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" or "Frère Jacques"—which might be harder to play, initially, than you would think. If you're more ambitious, try tackling something like "Little Dance in Canon Form" from composer Béla Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* or parts of a Bach Invention.

Looping

Guitar legends such as Bill Frisell and David Torn have made looping an integral part of their live shows. At its most extreme, looping is almost like real-time multitracking: You can continually add layers of sound, starting with a bass figure, then a layer of chords, followed by a muted, single-note rhythm part, and then a solo on top. Pedals like the Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler (street $236), Boss DD-7, and Eventide TimeFactor (street $399) have built-in looping functionality and are good options for getting started with looping.

One tricky thing with looping is that the start and end points of the loop have to be rhythmically precise: When you first record the loop, you have to start the loop on the first beat of the phrase, and then stop the loop when the first beat occurs again—thus cutting off the note's sustain to avoid overlap. In every loop, the last note will immediately flow into the repetition of the first note.



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CALCULATING MS FROM BPM

A song's tempo is usually expressed in terms of beats per minute (bpm). But figuring out a song's tempo by counting beats for 60 seconds isn't especially practical. A more efficient way is to find a smaller multiple of 60 and use that as the basis for your calculations. For example, you can count how many beats go by in 15 seconds and multiply that by 4 (15 x 4 = 60 seconds or one minute) or you can count how many beats go by in 10 seconds then multiply that by 6. It can be hard to get a really accurate reading with this approach, but it will get you in the ballpark, if you're in a pinch.

However, while most musicians think of tempo in terms of bpm, most delay units represent delay time as milliseconds (ms). Studio guitarists used to carry conversion charts in their gigbags to make sure they could always lock in with tempos at a session, and we're including one for you below.

If you ever find yourself in need of a beat-matched delay but don't have this chart handy, you can use some basic formulas to convert the desired bpm into ms and set your delay accordingly. The basis for the formulas is the number 60,000—the number of milliseconds in a minute. To convert bpm to ms, the formula is:

60,000/bpm = quarter-note ms

For example, 60,000/100 bpm = 600 ms. If you're playing to a track that is 100 bpm, you'll need to set your delay at 600 ms to get quarter-note repeats.

To get smaller subdivisions of the quarter note, there are two approaches. You can divide the quarter-note ms reading proportionately, as needed. For repeats in eighth-notes, divide the quarter-note ms by 2, and for repeats in 16ths, divide the quarter-note ms by 4. At a tempo of 100 bpm, quarter-note repeats are 600 ms, eighth-note repeats are 300 ms, and 16th-note repeats are 150 ms.

Or you can use these formulas:

30,000/bpm = eighth-note ms

15,000/bpm = 16th-note ms

For triplet-based music, the formula is:

40,000/bpm = quarter-note-triplet ms

For example, 40,000 divided by 100 bpm = 400 ms. You can divide the quarter-note-triplet ms reading to get values for eighth- and 16th-note triplets. To get eighth-note-triplet repeats, divide the quarter-note-triplet ms by 2, and to get 16th-note-triplet repeats, divide the quarter-note-triplet ms by 4. At a tempo of 100 bpm, quarter-note-triplet repeats are 400 ms, eighth-note-triplet repeats are 200 ms, and 16th-note-triplet repeats are 100 ms.

Or you can use these formulas:

20,000/bpm = eighth-note-triplet ms

10,000/bpm = 16th-note-triplet ms

To calculate ms for dotted-eighth-note rhythmic repeats, the formula is:

45,000/bpm = dotted-eighth-note ms

For example at 100 bpm, you will need a delay time of 450 ms to get repeats in dotted-eighth-notes.

CONVERSION CHART

bpm	1/4-note	1/8-note	1/16-note	1/4 triplets	1/8 triplets	1/16 triplets
60	1000	500	250	667	333	167
80	750	375	188	500	250	125
100	600	300	150	400	200	100
120	500	250	125	333	167	83
140	429	214	107	286	143	71
160	375	188	94	250	125	63
180	333	167	83	222	111	56
200	300	150	75	200	100	50
220	273	136	68	182	91	45
240	250	125	63	167	83	42

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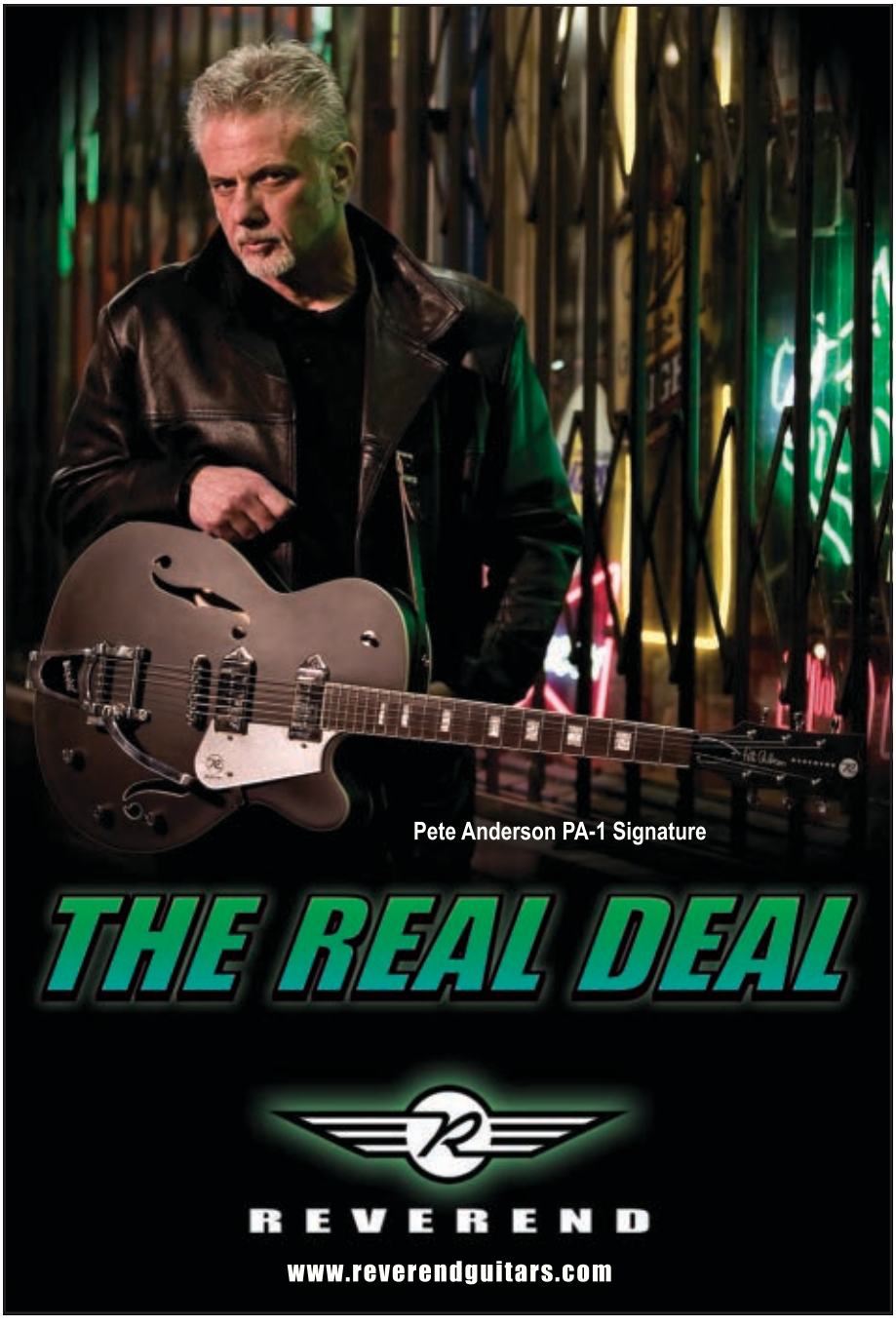
Many newer digital delays—including the Eventide TimeFactor (left), Boss DD-7 (shown on p.140), and Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler (right)—also feature built-in looping functionality.



Sometimes there might be a very slight lag before the effect is actually activated after you step on the pedal. We're talking milliseconds here, but you might feel it and may have to adjust the timing of your stomps accordingly.

If the maximum looping time available on your delay device is too short for some of your more ambitious looping applications, there are still good uses for it. For example, if you only had enough delay time to have one harmony or drone note sound, you could leave it on for infinite feedback and practice playing and hearing scales or patterns against the fixed tonal center. You could also use it to loop a note that you could tune the rest of your strings to if you don't have a tuner (at least you'd be in tune with yourself!). These may not be performance-critical uses, but they could certainly be helpful in your development as a musician.

Adventure Awaits ... Awaits ... Awaits

Although we've explored its most common uses, there are still many more sounds and textures that can be created with a delay pedal—in fact, the possibilities are nearly endless. And whether you arm yourself with a basic echo box or one of the newer units with a bunch of bells and whistles, learning to see and use the effect in a fresh new way—just as the Edge and Eddie Van Halen did—could make you the next sonic innovator whose sonic weapon is the delectable delay.

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GREEN

A historical account of guitardom's most iconic overdrive pedal—the Ibanez Tube Screamer.

BY LINDSAY TUCKER
PHOTOS COURTESY OF IBANEZ

First designed by one S. Tamura in the late '70s, the Ibanez Tube Screamer is arguably the most beloved of overdrive pedals. It's been rocked by guitar greats as diverse as Eric Johnson, Trey Anastasio, and Brad Paisley, and some would go as far as saying no single pedal has had a greater impact on musical expression or played as important a role in the development of effects modification.

The essence of the Tube Screamer's appeal—what multitudes of similar designs that it has inspired over the years aim to capture—are the subtly pleasing qualities it induces as it interacts with a tube amp: As you increase the amplitude of an input signal to overload a tube amp's preamp, it distorts the signal in a way that adds sustain, edge, and harmonic liveliness, while preserving the innate tonal characteristics of the guitar and amp—and without obscuring the player's dynamics. For the Tube Screamer, the design goal was to distort the signal symmetrically, not asymmetrically like a vacuum tube does.

Humble Beginnings

Stompboxes emerged as the guitarist's tone-warping tool of choice in the wake of the guitar mania fueled by British Invasion bands like the Stones, the Beatles, and the Kinks in the mid 1960s, and then Hendrix, Beck, and Cream toward the end of that decade. Though these bands predominantly

A TUBE SCREAMER TIME LINE

1979-1981
Model: TS808
Series: Top Ten
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: First Tube Screamer. Considered by some to be the holy grail of overdrives.
Country of Origin: Japan

GIANT

relied on tube amps for classic tones, the new sounds they injected into their signal paths via pedals were made possible by the 1948 invention of the transistor. Pedals quickly became one of the most cost-effective, convenient, and instantaneous ways to generate the exciting new sounds that shaped rock 'n' roll—and modern culture by extension. By the late '60s, the market was flooded with portable sound-modifying devices, and effects became commonplace in pop music. Sonic expression was forever changed.

Ibanez and its parent company, Hoshino, were infamous in the late '60s and early '70s for their Fender, Gibson, and Rickenbacker knockoffs. Unsurprisingly, it also added effects pedals to its lineup by the mid '70s. These pedals were actually manufactured by Nisshin, a Japanese company that produced pickups for some Ibanez guitars. In a curious business arrangement, Nisshin was allowed to market its own line of effects, which were identical to those it made for Ibanez, and they were sold under the Maxon brand name. By the late '70s, Nisshin was developing the first Tube Screamer—the famed TS808 that debuted in 1979 and that was later popularized by Stevie Ray Vaughan, among others. According to former Ibanez product manager John Lomas, when the Tube Screamer was created, Roland—a major Japanese competitor—was producing the Boss OD-1 OverDrive and already had a patent on solid-state asymmetrical clipping. This prompted Nisshin to use symmetrical clipping in the Tube Screamer.

1982-1984
Model: TS9
Series: 9 Series
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Same basic configuration as TS808 but with a bigger footswitch and 9V AC operation.
Country of Origin: Japan

1984
Model: ST9
Series: 9 Series
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Mid Boost, Tone, Level
Notes: Mid Boost control added. Breifly available in Europe but not in the US. Extremely rare.
Country of Origin: Japan
Photo by Mike "Analog Man" Piera

1985
Model: STL Super Tube
Series: Master/L
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Level, Bite, Bright
Notes: Not officially a Tube Screamer, but uses a Tube Screamer circuit with a 2-band EQ.
Country of Origin: Japan

1986-1993
Model: TS10
Series: Power/10 Series
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Changed cosmetically to match the 10 Series. John Mayer's current Tube Screamer of choice.
Country of Origin: Taiwan

1991-1998
Model: TS5
Series: Soundtank
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Changed cosmetically to match the Soundtank Series of smaller, plastic pedals.
Country of Origin: Taiwan

1992-Present
Model: TS9 Reissue
Series: 9 Series
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Faithful reproduction of the original TS9.
Country of Origin: Japan

"If you look at the schematic between a Tube Screamer and a Boss OD-1, they're almost exactly the same thing," Lomas says. "The OD-1, though, is what they call an asymmetrical clipper. When you put a signal in it, it does not distort the top and bottom of the soundwave the same. Instead, it distorts one differently—the way a tube would. The original Boss OverDrive was designed to be a tube simulator, which was really big back then because, of course, most amplifiers were starting to get away from tubes. They were solid-state, and they really sounded like shit. So there was a market for tube-simulation pedals. I believe that's probably why the Tube Screamer was named the Tube Screamer."

The TS808 also differed from the OD-1 in that it had a Tone control, featured a common JRC 4558D integrated circuit (IC) chip, and had a small rectangular footswitch. "The Tube Screamer was really the first pedal I saw that had an IC in it," says Lomas. "All the overdrives prior to the Tube Screamer were built around transistors." Lomas contends that the sweet, vocal midrange sound the TS808 is known for has everything to do with that JRC4558D IC chip—which explains why Lomas and many other overdrive aficionados prefer the sound of the original over other permutations of the pedal that have emerged over the years.

The TS Hits Its Stride

Despite the popularity and Holy Grail status attained by the original TS808, the Tube Screamer wasn't left alone—and plenty of pedal lovers are glad. Perhaps the most popular of all Tube Screamers, the TS9 replaced the TS808 in 1982 with the introduction of the 9 Series. The TS9 was slightly brighter and a little less smooth sounding than the 808. The two were almost identical internally, apart from the TS9's expanded output. The footswitch got bigger, too. Nine Series pedals had a footswitch that took up approximately a third of the pedal—a move clearly intended to compete with the easy-to-stomp design of Boss pedals. However, one drawback of the new Tube Screamer, according to Lomas, was that TS9s were built with a somewhat random sourcing of parts—basically whatever was readily available at the time of manufacture. This resulted in TS9s that varied widely in tone from batch to batch.

"[The introduction of the TS9] was not a magical moment by any stretch of the imagination," Lomas says. "The public didn't give a rat's ass—not for the longest time. It caught on much later. I would say guys really started talking about it in the late '80s, and by 1990 it was really starting to roll along." Since there was little demand for the TS9 when it came out, it was out of production by 1985. Ibanez then released a new series of stompboxes, the Master Series, without a Tube Screamer in the lineup. Instead, it included the Super Tube STL—a 4-knob affair with a Tube Screamer circuit and a 2-band EQ. According to "Analog Mike" Piera—a noted stompbox expert whose company, Analog Man, began modifying Tube Screamers to original specs in the mid 1990s—the STL was similar to the rare (and very valuable) European ST-9 Super Tube Screamer that was never released in the US.

The Master Series only ran for one year, though—and the Tube Screamer wasn't M.I.A. for long. In 1986, Ibanez released the brightly colored Power Series (aka the 10 Series), which boasted a new, high-fidelity TS10 with quieter circuitry that

1998-Present
Model: TS9DX
Series: 9 Series
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level, Mode
Notes: Offers traditional Tube Screamer tones, as well as three additional modes with increasing amounts of volume and bass response.
Country of Origin: Japan

2000-2010
Model: TS7
Series: ToneLok
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Knobs can be reccessed into the pedal to avoid setting changes or knob breakage. Hot switch adds extra distortion.
Country of Origin: China

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The "magic" found in some (but not all) classic vintage pickups was created by accident. Don't let anyone tell you different. And over time, some pretty stellar accidents happened. The only way to recreate that magic is to study more than a few exceptional examples of all the classic pickup types, while acquiring a thorough understanding of exactly what materials were used and precisely how each pickup was constructed and wound. Only then is the "magic" repeatable, if you are willing to spend the time and money required to chase the dragon. I am.

I personally design and wind over 30 different pickup models, including all the vintage classics, many obscure works of art known only to lap and pedal steel players like Robert Randolph, and even a few of my own designs that never existed in the past.

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2004-Present
Model: TS808 Reissue
Series: N/A
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Faithful reproduction of the original TS808.
Country of Origin: Japan

2008-Present
Model: TS808HW
Series: N/A
Knob Configuration: Overdrive, Tone, Level
Notes: Handwired version of the TS808. First TS to feature true-bypass switching. Very limited production.
Country of Origin: Japan

2011
Model: TS9B
Series: 9 Series
Knob Configuration: Drive, Level, Bass, Treble, Mix
Notes: First Tube Screamer designed for bassists. Features a 2-band EQ and a Mix control.
Country of Origin: Japan

eliminated the vexatious chirp that older Tube Screamers sometimes emitted when all the controls were turned up. However, these alterations affected the burgeoning star's signature tone, and the TS10 wasn't as well received as Hoshino hoped. Thanks to blues and blues-rock mavens like SRV, many players were getting hooked on the tones of TS808 and TS9 Tube Screamers.

Piera says that, until the recent use of TS10s by players such as John Mayer, TS10s had remained undesirable. "I still hate them," he says, calling it a "disposable" pedal. "They used cheap, proprietary parts—jacks, switches, and pots that often break and can't be replaced, because the sturdy parts used in handmade, handwired pedals like the TS9 won't fit. They have circuit boards that have all these parts mounted on them that break off, just so they could make pedals cheaply with machine soldering."

Lomas explains how the economy affected the quality of manufacturing during those years. "When I first joined the company," says Lomas, "back around '83 or '84, it was, like, 260 yen to the dollar. Today, it's around 77 or 78. Back around '85, the yen started a turnaround and was coming down to about 150, 160—and they [Hoshino] were crapping their pants. They used to be able to take anything that was made in Japan and throw it out on the US market and make money because it was good quality and the exchange rate was very favorable for the yen. Then, suddenly, they had to start worrying about making things cost effectively."

When Ibanez launched its Soundtank effects line in 1991, the new TS5 Tube Screamer's design goal was to capture the sound of the older, vintage units at cheaper costs by using streamlined manufacturing techniques. The TS5 was not handwired like the TS9 and TS808, and it was eventually sold in a high-impact plastic case, rather than the original metal casing. The TS5's circuit is comparable to the TS9, but it was made by Taiwan-based manufacturer Daphon rather than Nisshin, and it featured smaller, cheaper components.

Rebirth of a Classic

Perhaps the resurrection of the TS9 was inevitable, but Lomas contributed to its legacy first by insisting on the 1992 reissue of the TS9, and then by developing the TS9DX Turbo Tube Screamer. He says when he took over product development in 1990, he immediately started pushing for a TS9 reissue. Used TS9s were selling in stores for well over $250, when Ibanez itself was selling used units to dealers for five bucks. Lomas says management was wary. Nisshin wanted to move toward digital technology and had no interest in going "backward" to the old analog products—which is somewhat ironic, Lomas notes, considering that Nisshin is producing many of the older analog effects now. "At the time," he says, "they thought we were crazy."

But money often talks when words fall short. After prolonged browbeating, Nisshin started to see the dollar signs that had convinced Lomas, and they authorized the reissue. Lomas recalls how he and his colleagues spent weeks buying every original TS9 they could get their hands on in order to ensure that the pending reissue was an exact replica. As they cracked open and examined the pedals, they found that almost every one had a Toshiba TA75558 IC chip rather than the JRC chip commonly found in TS808s. "Since 90, 95 percent of TS9s had that chip," says Lomas, "that's what we decided to put back in it." He recalls with a hint of nostalgia the way the company boasted about the reissue when it

Rich Juzwick
of Gemini Syndrome

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finally came out—about how it was made in the same factory as the original. "It was even built by the same middle-aged ladies. It was a dead, nuts-on copy," he says. Even the manual was identical—dated 1981, for authenticity. More than 5,000 sold within weeks of the release, and Ibanez estimates it has sold 10,000–12,000 TS9 reissues each year over the last decade.

With the success of the TS9 reissue, the TS9DX seemed like a no-brainer. According to Lomas, the company watched, a glint of envy in its eye, as Dunlop multi-load wah pedals flew off the shelves. Hoshino felt it needed a Tube Screamer with different modes for output and distortion, and it seemed the only thing to do was to get in on the action.

"[The introduction of the TS9] was not a magical moment by any stretch of the imagination. The public didn't give a rat's ass—not for the longest time." —Former Ibanez product manager John Lomas

So, in 1998, Lomas designed the DX for players who craved more volume, distortion, and low end. In addition to the Drive, Tone, and Level knobs that had already become Tube Screamer staples, he added a fourth knob with four mode positions: TS9, +, Hot, and Turbo, each one adding low end and increasing volume to some degree. The circuit is exactly the same as that of the original TS9, but the mode switch changes certain components' parameters via clipping diodes and tone capacitors. The + mode is grittier than the original TS9, whereas Hot yields a crunchier tone with boosted mids, and Turbo, the most powerful of the four modes, projects a thicker, more modern sound.

"I wanted to come up with something that would be as true to the Tube Screamer tonality as possible, so that at least in one position it would be a classic Tube Screamer," says Lomas. "That's where I came up with the concept of varying the clippers. I didn't want any digital simulation because, in my mind, it just wouldn't be a Tube Screamer then."

A Legacy of Mids

In the past decade, the Tube Screamer has continued to evolve with new editions such as the TS7 Tone-Lok, the TS808 reissue, the TS9B (reviewed on p.240)—the first Tube Screamer for bass—and the 2010 introduction of the Tube Screamer amp—an ultra-portable, low-wattage amp (available in head and combo versions) that incorporates a selectable Tube Screamer circuit in its preamp. So far, 15-watt head and combo models are available, although models with varying wattages are rumored to be in the works.

Despite the Tube Screamer's many variations, Ibanez electronics merchandiser Frank Facciolo says its legendary sound is rooted in its characteristic midrange presence. Lomas agrees. "It's still one of the best things to overdrive any tube amplifier with," he says. "It just does magical things to tubes."

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KEELEY ELECTRONICS' ROBERT KEELEY

Over the past 10 years, Robert Keeley has watched his company grow from offering a few experimental pedals into a major effects manufacturer with products being sold in more than 200 US stores and nearly 100 internationally. Here he reflects on the journey, technological strides, and where he sees his company going in the future.

BY LINDSAY TUCKER

Robert Keeley wants to solve your sonic problems. His business is only 10 years old, but in the guitar-pedal universe he's known as a guru at taking the most beloved effects and making them even better. He says it's all the result of a serendipitous accident—a conversation he had with his wife one day when he was desperately trying to get his hands on a Ross Compressor. His inner voice of reason spoke loud and clear: "Didn't you just get a degree for building those things so you wouldn't have to spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on vintage ones?"

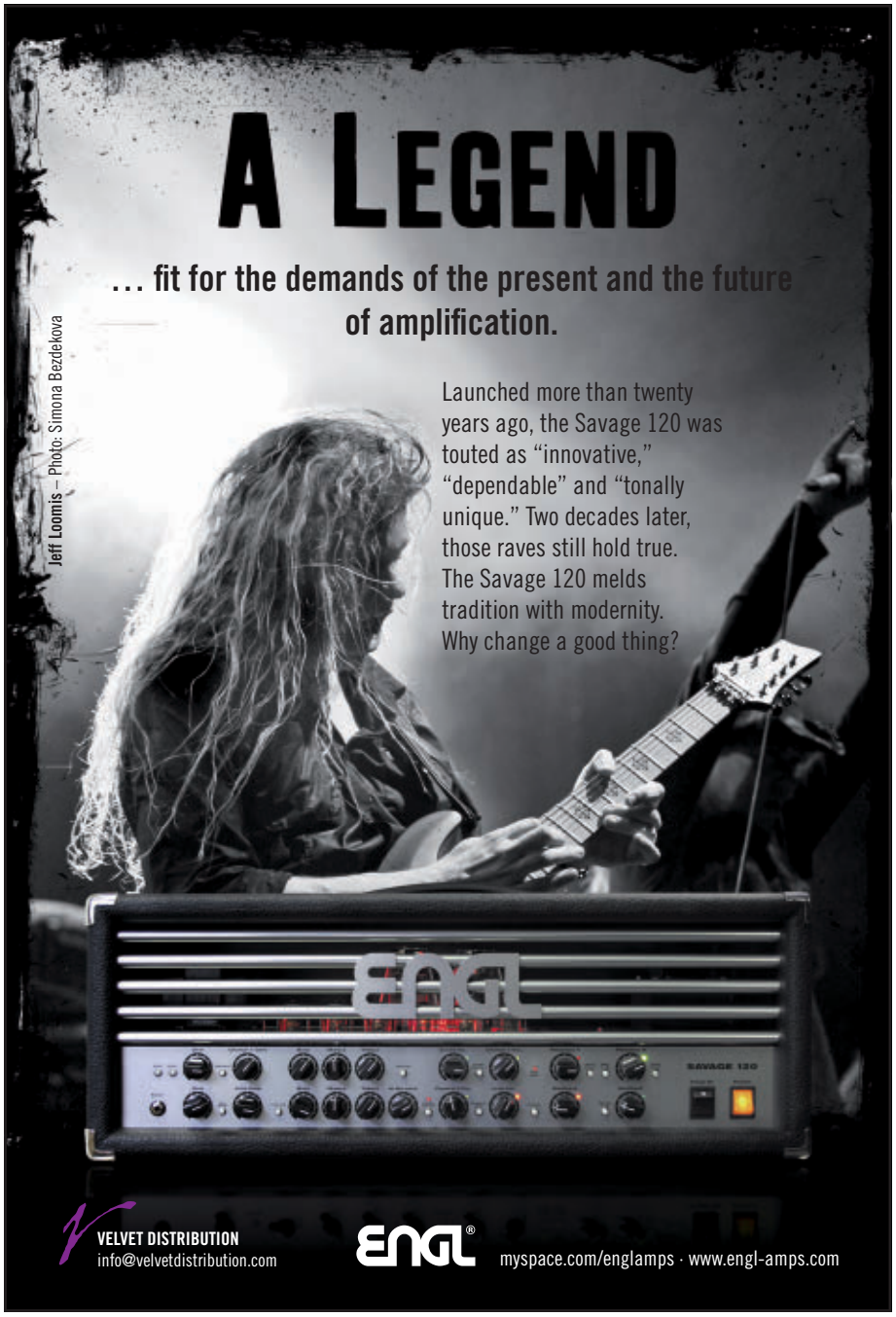
It was early 2001, and Keeley had recently earned his electrical-engineering degree from Oklahoma University. He had been hoping to break into the amp-building industry—an industry that was already highly saturated and becoming more so every day—but instead he was teaching. He enjoyed it, but not nearly as much as his music obsession.

"Sure enough, I did find the schematic and the parts for the [Ross] pedal, and I took off and built one," Keeley says with childlike enthusiasm. "When I heard it, it was magical—I was completely stunned." In fact, hearing his own handiwork generated enough personal excitement and fervor to convince Keeley to ditch his teaching career and start Keeley Electronics. At that point, few people were doing modifications and independent effects, so the lack of competition was reassuring.

"I had been wanting to get into the business one way or another, and it just so happened that guitar effects came together really nicely," he says. "At the time, it was just me, Analog Man [Mike "Analog Man" Piera from Analog Man effects], and Mike Fuller [from Fulltone]—I had no competition. There was just nobody out there." Keeley says meticulous attention to detail and a strong focus on customer service were the foundation of his business.

He sold a handful of units, and then a few dozen. He couldn't believe how swiftly his name spread throughout the industry. Soon he had sold hundreds. He says his customers were so thrilled with the sound of his effects that, in almost no time, they'd made their way into the hands of some very influential players in Nashville and California.

"My beloved [Keeley-modded] Tube Screamer had more clarity, more bottom—and it even got a little dirtier than the stock one. It became my go-to overdrive pedal."
— Chad Weaver, former Brad Paisley guitar tech



Brad Paisley's former guitar tech, Chad Weaver, attests to the rapidity of Keeley's success. Curious as to whether he'd like the sound of true-bypass, Weaver ordered a Keeley Blues Driver mod (a modified Boss BD-2 Blues Driver overdrive). Imagine his surprise when he excitedly tore open the package to find an Ibanez Tube Screamer inside. "It was an honest mistake," he says. "When I called Robert to let him know I'd gotten the wrong pedal, he said two boxes were mixed up in shipping, and he would immediately send the correct one." Keeley also told Weaver that the Tube Screamer would be a gift for the inconvenience. "That alone told me a lot about the man, but it wasn't until I met him that I realized how truly passionate he is about his work," says Weaver.

"At one point," Weaver explains, "I had only read about Robert Keeley and his products, but after actually hearing them I found so many other reasons to use them. Here was someone who was taking the effects I liked and improving upon them. My beloved Tube Screamer had more clarity, more bottom—and it even got a little dirtier than the stock one. It became my go-to overdrive pedal," he says.

Mod Talk

The range of modifications that Keeley eventually came up with was born of a simple process: He identified common complaints about popular pedals and then set out to correct them. He found that websites such as Harmony Central were great for this, as the millions of guitar players who post reviews on the internet weren't shy about voicing their grievances. "I'd just get online and literally tally up the complaints and fix those little problems," he says. "So our [Ibanez] TS9 mods or BD-2s are products of me simply listing out the cons

Left to right: The Keeley 4-Knob Compressor has sold more than 27,000 units since 2001. The Fuzz Head is a germanium fuzz with modern gain stages. And the Luna Overdrive features an ultra-flexible EQ section.

and then putting tick marks in each column. One mark for bad phasers, etc., and that gave me the exact road map to then develop all of our mods."

Keeley's TS9 mod—one of his most popular—has been used by Peter Frampton, Jon Herington of Steely Dan, and former Frank Zappa sideman Ike Willis, to name a few. He starts by first changing the circuit to a Texas Instruments RC4558P. Then he changes the output resistors to metal-film ones rather than carbon-comp resistors, which add unwanted noise. This results in better bass response, a greater range of overdrive, and the ability to achieve a cleaner sound by turning down.

His process for developing mods naturally led him to working on kits for big-name brands. To this day, he simply watches what's selling unless a player commissions him for a specific project. "There weren't many people doing modifications to a variety of popular Boss and Ibanez pedals—at least not doing them *en masse*," Keeley says. "I essentially became a dealer for Boss and Ibanez, so I could get them at a good price. Then I quickly got them to people like Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, and John Mayer—when he was still a little kid—and all the country guys, too. Like Brad Paisley. I heard their complaints and solved the problems they were having with the units."

""The projects I did in college that were guitar-related were all based on stuff that hadn't changed since the '80s, so I had to use microprocessors to control ancient technologies." —Robert Keeley

A few days before being interviewed for this article, Keeley was working on a mod of the popular MXR Phase 90 for Steely Dan's Donald Fagen. He laughs, because he was copying a design from 1974, but technology has come so far since. "The technology these days is just really incredible," he says. "The projects I did in college that were guitar-related were all based on stuff that hadn't changed since the '80s, so I had to use microprocessors to control ancient technologies. There was nothing really new to experiment with. People who were making ICs were keeping them to themselves." He admits that, due to these technological advances, building and modifying effects has become much easier than he imagined it would be when he was in school. On one hand, this reality makes his job easier, but on the other it was also enough to spawn an entire industry of copycats.

Adjusting to the Competition

Somewhere tucked away in Keeley's closet is a T-shirt that reads, "Keeley, the House of Blue Lights." It was a gift from a customer, referencing the blue LEDs that had become his trademark. At the time, no effects manufacturer was using blue LEDs—which is part of the reason he chose to do so in the first place. Today, blue LEDs are more common than he'd like. Keeley says he went from having almost no competitors to hundreds—people who apply his concepts and even his name to mods they hock online. He warns unsuspecting eBay users to beware. "College students," he says, "are

sitting in their underwear in their dorm rooms with a bag of Cheetos, copying my mods and putting them up on eBay, starting their own websites, or giving them away for free. They'll say, 'Hey, this has got a Keeley Mod,' and people will purchase it, thinking it does."

Initially, he says, he was flattered by all the impersonators. But after he was forced to start laying people off due to lost business, it lost its charm. He finally addressed the situation. "I tried to encourage them to come up with their own names and brands," he says. "I even offered to help with designs and come up with new things so they'd be less inclined to copy our stuff." He says that, for as many people as his confrontation deterred, an equal number are still out there. Maybe that's just the price one pays for being a front-runner.

Unique Designs

Though many would-be impostors might be able to pull off some of Keeley's mods, most aren't able to build effects from the ground up like he does. When it comes to his custom pedals, Keeley says he likes to keep things simple, while also incorporating the most recent technology. His philosophy today is to "create simple, straightforward things *conceptually*, but with hi-fi or commercial-grade fittings to make them better than the competitor."

That translates to a product line that's compelling but not elaborate. "We don't have any wild and crazy digital delays or fuzzes with 20 knobs on them," he says. Citing his very first unique design, the Katana Boost, Keeley says he envisioned it being unique but with a very simple function. Using a vintage doubler (a circuit with an AC input and a DC output of roughly twice the peak input voltage), he created a pedal that many players love for both the cleanness of its boost *and* its harmonic richness.

The Fuzz Head—another favorite of Keeley's customers—is a simple blend of vintage germanium-fuzz design with modern gain stages that he says allow it to excel as a lead boost *or* to lay down thick, tube-like tones. "It's just a very basic circuit," he says, "coupled with stuff that I learned from modifying Boss and Ibanez stuff. At the time of its creation people, weren't commonly using buffers or differential amplifiers with fuzz circuits."

"[Other builders] were trying to find old carbon-comp resistors and old caps with 20 percent tolerance. Meanwhile, I was trying to go for the 1 percent precision or the even higher precision—maybe .01 tolerance." —Robert Keeley

But of all his unique pedals, the Keeley Compressor is by far the most popular. He's sold close to 27,000 since its inception in late 2001, and orders continue to pour in. He attributes its popularity to the quality of its components, which reduce the level of unwanted noise—a common artifact with high compression settings. He also says when he was first designing the pedal, none of his peers were using the high-end parts that he was going after. "They were trying to find old carbon-comp resistors and old caps with 20 percent tolerance," he says. "Meanwhile, I was trying to go for the 1 percent precision or the even higher precision—maybe .01 tolerance—so the compressor did its job to the best of its ability. Ours was better than the competitors', because we made those efforts. [At that time] no one had taken a simple design paired with hi-fi parts—it just wasn't common to use high-end parts in the guitar-effects world."

Given how popular quality compression is with country twangers, it's notable that even Paisley's former tech was surprised by the love-at-first-sound affair he had with the Keeley Compressor. "Finally, someone had made [a compressor] that didn't color the sound," Weaver says. "My tremolo pedal no longer had a level drop when I stepped on it."

These days, Keeley resents that, with his company-running duties, he's not able to experiment with new designs as much as he'd like—although he tries to reserve every Friday for tinkering. "Months have gone by where I don't get to touch a circuit," he says. "Every time it seems like I'm going to be able to experiment a lot more than one day a week, we undergo some growth or another and it just doesn't happen." Just such a situation arose recently when Keeley announced that Guitar Center is now carrying his stompboxes—but the amount of production needed to fill orders took over his ability to experiment. Instead, he has an engineer whom he says he can vicariously experiment through by making suggestions. "I don't have to have my hands on everything to do the experimenting," he says.

In addition to being excited about the new deal with Guitar Center, Keeley is also stoked about the newest addition to his custom line, the Luna Overdrive, which he began developing in 2008. According to Keeley, it's different from anything else on the market—the fruition of his desire to combine an overdrive pedal with a hi-fi EQ. It took three years to get off the ground, but in March of this year the Luna became available to the public. Like all of his designs, it's completely handmade, and his website boasts that the Luna is capable of operating as a smooth, subtle drive that provides plenty of warmth but can also achieve a grittier sound with two different drive stages and highly responsive Hi and Lo tone controls.

Though Keeley is thrilled by every new product he adds to his line, he says the future of his company lies in perfecting what he considers to be the staples of the guitar effects world. Despite the living he's made based largely on modding Boss and Ibanez pedals, Keeley says he views his company as being more like Fender than Boss or Ibanez. "I want to stick to the basic tools that the guitar player needs," he explains. "Fender doesn't have new models and new shapes and designs every year. They have the same one or different variations on a theme, and that's where I see myself in the future. I think I would like to stick with the basics like the preamp, the compressor, and the simpler concepts—and just do those really, really well."

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4 PEDAL MODS FOR THE MASSES

Ever thought it might be cool to get into pedal modding but didn't know where to start? Problem solved. Here, Ben Fulton, CEO and head designer at Red Witch Analog Pedals in New Zealand, walks you step-by-step through four mods perfect for the budding solder jockey.

BY BEN FULTON

For a certain breed, the very notion of pedal modifications—the process of changing or altering some aspect of an existing effects pedal—conjures dreams of creating the ultimate pedal. Something uniquely capable of providing a portal into uncharted regions of creativity. Something that inspires gig tales in the vein of, "Yeah, man, I was about to launch into my solo, so I stepped on my custom-modded [INSERT PEDAL NAME HERE] and … Oh. My. GOD. The heavens opened … angels wept … and some guy with excellent hair and a beard gave me the Arthur Fonzarelli double thumbs up. My solo changed lives that night. Some say world peace became a tangible possibility. However, it would have been nothing without my custom modded [INSERT PEDAL NAME HERE]."

Or something like that.

At the other end of the spectrum, you've got players who ask, "Why on earth would I want to mess with a perfectly good piece of kit?" Which is a fair point, to be sure. And then there are those in the middle who are curious and who, maybe—just *maybe*—might like to try a few easy or medium-difficulty mods just for kicks. This article is for those guys.

Though all mods are intended to result in elevated creative output, they fall into three categories: aesthetic, tonal, and structural. Aesthetic mods alter or improve the stompbox's appearance, tonal mods change the actual sound of the device, and structural mods improve the pedal's build quality or reliability.

If you're ready to take on one or more of the following mods, please read all the instructions before deciding if you want to try it, and only do so if you're confident you can complete the procedure. All the mods work perfectly when executed correctly, but neither *Premier Guitar* nor I can provide support if things don't work out right. (Sorry!) Another point to keep in mind before proceeding is that your pedal's warranty will be rendered null and void as soon as any aspect of its circuit is modified. If you're cool with that, let's dive in.

Soldering Brush Up

Okay, first things first. These mods require you to open up your pedal and desolder and solder things. If you've never soldered before, you'll definitely want to practice a bunch before dripping molten metal alloys into your beloved pedal. You can find a very helpful and thorough soldering tutorial on YouTube if you search for "How and Why to Solder Correctly." For a great clip about removing solder, search for "How to Solder: Removing Solder."

All right, now that that's all sorted, on to the fun stuff!

MOD 1 LED Replacement

Mod Type: Aesthetic
Difficulty Level: Easy
What You Need:

- Soldering iron
- Solder
- LEDs (same size as existing LEDs)
- Replacement clear bezels (optional)
- Side cutters
- Solder sucker
- Phillips screwdriver

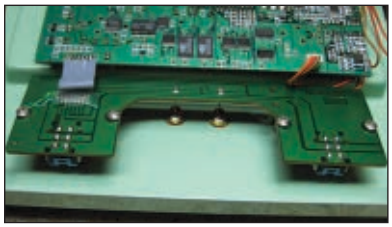
Our first mod is replacing a stompbox's LEDs. It's purely for visual vibe, but it's a fun way to make your pedal a little more unique—and to get your feet wet with some pedal-modding basics.

A light-emitting diode (LED) is a small diode that emits light when a direct current is passed through it. Like all diodes, LEDs have polarity, like batteries, and therefore need to be hooked up properly on their positive and negative sides in order to work.

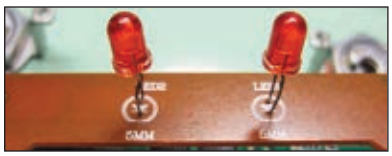
When I was looking for a pedal that could use some tarting up, I came across a Danelectro Reel Echo. Perfectly cool pedal, but its red LEDs don't fill me with the requisite visual joy one would like when engaging the sonic glory of a delay. The Reel Echo is particularly good for a first-time LED-mod experience, because it's large and the LED board is easy to get to.

To remove the old LEDs and install the new ones:

1. Open up the beast. This particular device requires removing four screws and sliding the bottom chassis out.

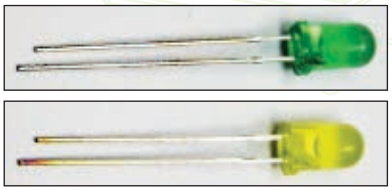


2. Remove the four screws that secure the switch/LED board, then turn it around to reveal the two red LEDs.

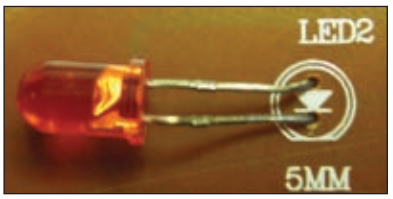


3. Use a ruler or calipers to measure them so you can purchase replacements of the proper size.

4. Once you've purchased replacement LEDs and are ready to proceed with installation, take a close look at them. See how the two legs go up into the plastic, and one connects to a larger tag of metal while the other connects to a small tag? The larger tag is always the cathode—or negative—side, while the little tag is the anode—or positive—side.

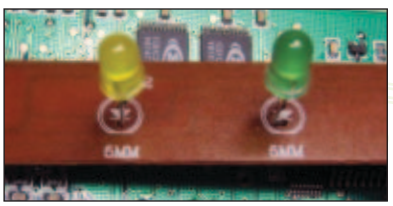


This unit couldn't be more perfect for this mod, because the board features the diode schematic symbol, which shows you which way the LEDs should be inserted. The cathode side goes in the hole near the base of the diode schematic symbol's triangle. The anode goes in the hole near the line at the tip of the triangle.



5. Desolder and remove the two old LEDs.

6. Insert and solder your new LEDs—being super careful to get the polarity correct.



7. Splendid—you're done! (Note that, because the Reel Echo comes with red bezels—colored lens-type covers over the LEDs—I replaced them with transparent bezels that reveal the yellow and green LEDs. Your pedal may or may not require new bezels in order to show your new LEDs.)

MOD 2 1/4" Input and Output Jack Replacement

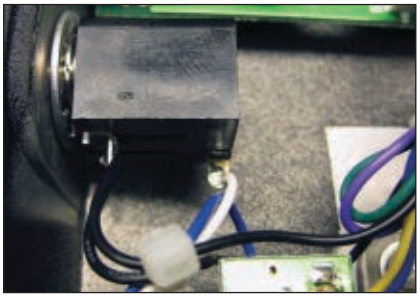
Mod Type: Structural
Difficulty Level: Easy
What You Need:

- Soldering iron
- Solder
- 1/4" mono Switchcraft jack
- 1/4" stereo Switchcraft jack
- Wire strippers
- Side cutters
- Nut socket for jack socket nut

Our guinea pig for mods 2, 3, and 4 is a charming little Vox V847 wah. This will do rather nicely, because its construction allows us to modify various bits without having to mess around much with circuit boards. For our second mod, we're going to replace the stock 1/4" jacks with top-shelf Switchcraft sockets that will improve reliability. This isn't to say that the original jacks aren't any good, it's just that the Switchcraft sockets are a little more rugged and durable.

Let's have a look inside. See those two rectangular black boxes just above the main circuit board? Those are the jacks—the input is on the left, and the output is on the right.

Now let's take a closer look at the wiring of the output socket (which, again, is on the right side when the pedal is turned over and situated as shown on previous page).



Notice that the white wire attaches to the "tip" tag of the jack, and the black wires connect to the "sleeve" tag.

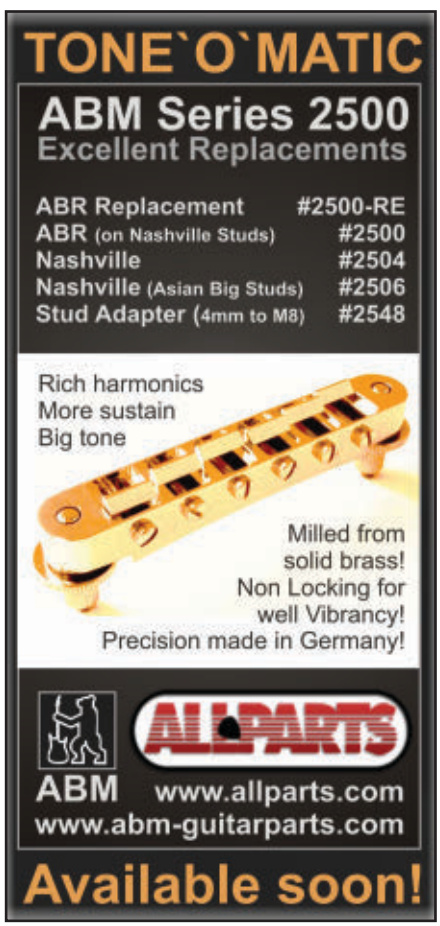
To remove the old output jack:

1. Heat up your soldering iron.
2. Desolder all three wires.
3. Unscrew the nut that holds the socket in place.
4. Remove the old jack.

To install the new output jack:

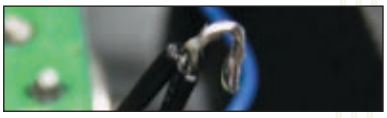
1. Take one mono Switchcraft socket and insert into the empty hole. You may need to use an awl or drill to slightly widen the hole so that the new jack fits.
2. Screw the nut in place. Be sure to include the locking washer between the socket and the side of the wah (as shown below).

3. Mad wicked—well done. Now take the black wires that were attached to the ring tag of the old socket and strip a little more than half an inch of plastic off the ends.
4. Twist the exposed parts of both black wires together (as shown below).



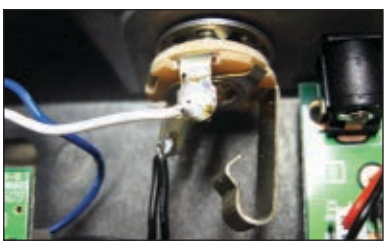
5. Now "tin" the twisted wires (as shown below). For help on this, refer to the previously mentioned YouTube solder primers. (Note: You'll need to tin every wire you solder in these projects.)

6. Bend the tinned wires into a hooked shape like the one shown below.



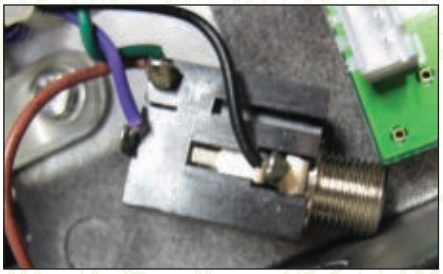
7. Thread the hooked black wires through the sleeve tag of the new jack (see below).

8. Solder the two black wires to the sleeve tag.
9. Thread the white wire through the new jack's tip tag (the only socket tag remaining).
10. Ace. Your new jack should look a lot like this.



Now let's move on to the input socket, which has an additional wire—the battery-switch wire. If you've ever wondered how your pedal's battery is turned on when you plug in, this little wire is the key. When the 1/4" cable is inserted, it shorts a connection between the sleeve tag and the ring tag of the socket. The sleeve tag is connected to the circuit's ground terminal. The green wire connects to the negative terminal of your battery. A circuit is made once the negative terminal of the battery is connected with the ground (or negative) terminal of the circuit. *Voilà*—it's alive! Very clever, eh?

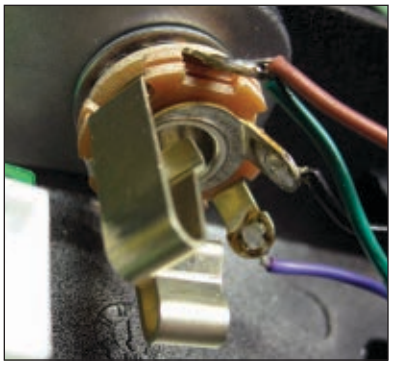
Have a look at the next photo—it's the original input jack.

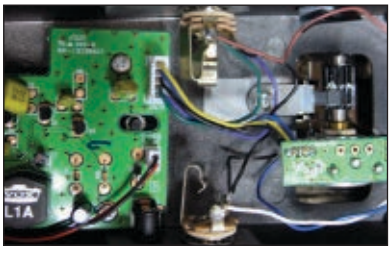


The black wire is the ground wire, which goes to the sleeve tag of the new Switchcraft socket. The green and brown wires carry the audio signal and are connected to the tip tag of the new jack. The purple wire is the battery switch that connects to the ring tag of the socket.

To remove the old input jack and install the new input jack:

1. Remove the wires in the same manner you did with the output jack.
2. Strip and tin each wire.
3. Unscrew and remove the old input socket.
4. Solder the brown and green wires to the tip tag.
5. Locate the sleeve tag—which attaches to the center portion of the socket—and solder the black wire to it.
6. Solder the purple wire to the remaining tag.
7. Brilliant! Your second mod is complete—take a bow! The wiring should look something like the photos below.





MOD 3 Adding a Fasel Inductor to a Wah

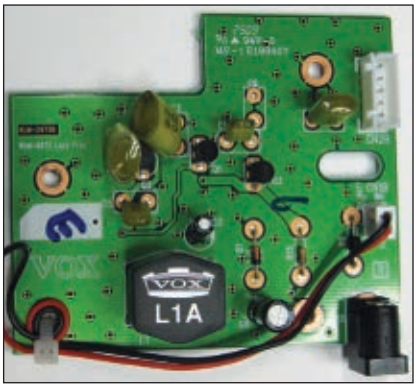
Mod Type: Tonal
Difficulty Level: Easy
What You Need:

- Soldering iron
- Solder
- Solder sucker
- Fasel inductor

Mod 3 is a wah-specific affair. We're going to swap out the existing inductor and replace it with a Fasel inductor. Technically, a wah is a band-pass filter—a boosted bump of frequencies, all of which are slid up and down by depressing the expression pedal. The heart of this effect in many wah pedals is the inductor, so replacing it can result in a different sound. "Different" does not necessarily mean "better," though. If you Google this issue, you'll see a lot of talk about how great a Fasel inductor sounds, but there are various flavors of Fasels available—including a classic '60s-style inductor (à la Hendrix) or a '70s disco-/porn-style affair. Choose wisely, young Jedi.

To install the new inductor:

1. Remove the wah's main circuit board by unplugging the white plug with five wires attached to it, and then gently pulling the board out of the pedal's housing. See the black thing with the Vox logo and "L1A" written on it? That's the inductor.



2. Turn the circuit board over, identify the solder pads that connect to the inductor, and desolder them.

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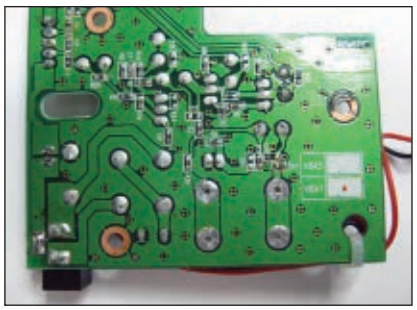
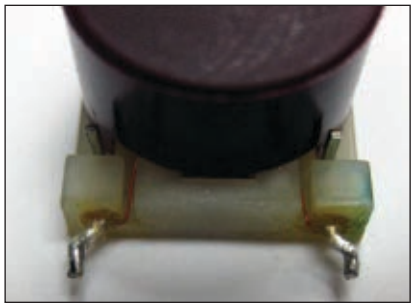
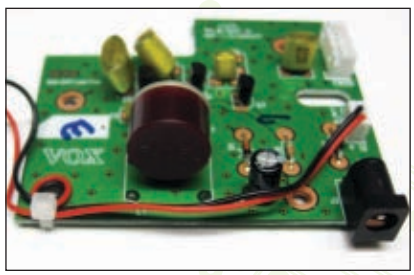


3. Gently bend out your new Fasel inductor's legs so they'll fit through the inductor socket's holes.



4. Pop the new inductor into the circuit board and resolder the connections.



5. Place the circuit board back in the pedal housing.
6. Plug the five-wired white plug back into the circuit board. You're done!

... true-bypass switching is great—but you always need to make sure you have one pedal in your signal chain with a good, quality buffered bypass if you're running long lengths of cable ...

MOD 4

True-Bypass Switching

Mod Type: Tonal

Difficulty Level: Medium

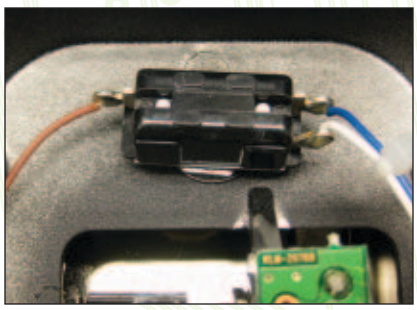
What You Need:

- Soldering iron
- Solder
- Spare wire
- Insulation tape OR heatshrink tubing
- A 2-pole/double-throw or 3-pole/double-throw stomp switch
- Wire strippers
- Side cutters
- Short piece of tinned wire
- Wrench for footswitch nut

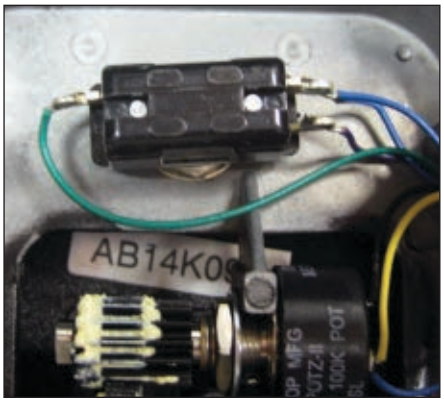
Our final mod is adding true-bypass switching to the same Vox wah from mods 2 and 3. Although we're demonstrating this procedure on a wah, it can be applied to any pedal—as long as you can isolate the input- and output-socket wires, and the circuit input and output wires, and follow the instructions below.

I started writing the pros and cons of this mod but swiftly realized such an essay could fill a page or so. There's plenty of info on it out there, so if you're inclined to dive into the minutia, go forth and do your research. My take on it is that true-bypass switching is great—but you always need to make sure you have one pedal in your signal chain with a good, quality buffered bypass if you're running long lengths of cable between your guitar, pedals, and amp. It all has to do with impedance. The low-impedance output of a good, buffered bypass pedal means you won't get any high frequency loss using long cables.

So, let's turn our Vox into a true-bypass device. First, let's have a look at the existing footswitch—the black rectangular box connected to the brown, white, and blue wires (shown below).



The brown wire comes from the input socket, while the white wire goes to the output socket, and the blue wire comes from the circuit's output. For those of you who have a Jim Dunlop Cry Baby wah, here's a pic of its switch.

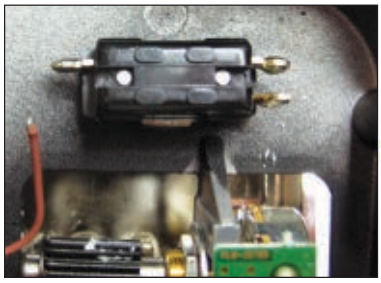


The color code for a Cry Baby is as follows: The green wire comes from the input socket, while the purple wire goes to the output socket, and the two blue wires connect to the circuit's output.

Okay, back to our Vox wah.

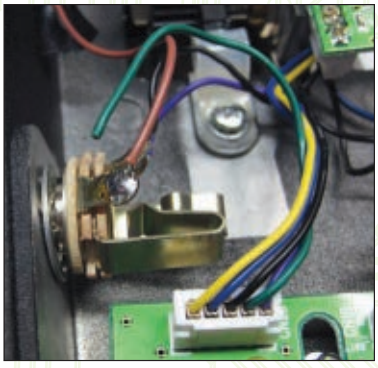
To remove the old footswitch and install the true-bypass one:

1. Desolder all three wires.



2. Now look at the input socket.

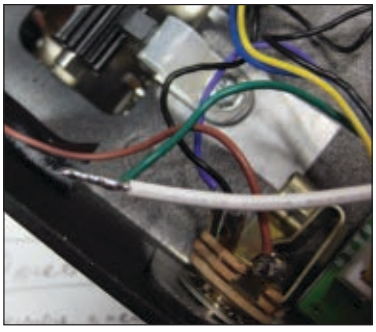
See the two wires attached to the tip tag—the brown and green ones? The green wire is the audio-input lead for the wah circuit. Clip it so that it's no longer connected to the tip tag.



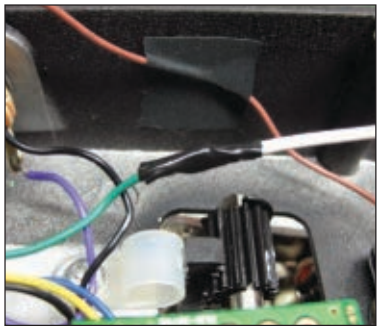
3. Take a 3"-4" spare piece of wire, strip each end, twist the smaller wire strands at each end together to create a single, tightly formed lead, and tin both ends with solder.

... we're confident that after you complete one or more [of these mods] and hear, see, or feel the difference it makes, you'll be eager to do more.

4. Strip the end of the green wire that you clipped in step 2. Then twist the green wire together with the new piece of wire prepared in step 3. To solidify their connection, solder them together.



5. Insulate this cleverly extended bit of wiring by either trimming and applying an appropriate length of heatshrink tubing OR wrapping the exposed portion in insulation tape, as shown below.

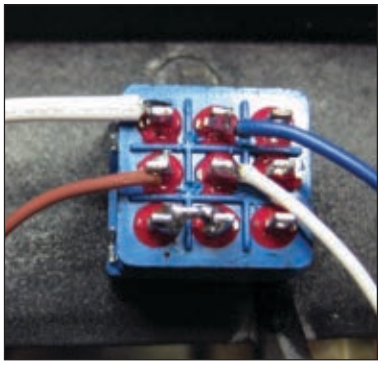


6. Now let's take a look at our new switch. Either a 2-pole/double-throw or 3-pole/double-throw will work. This one is a 3-pole/double-throw, but we'll only use two of the three poles.

Note the nine tags on the bottom. (The piece of tinned bridging wire is on the table next to the switch.)

7. Position your switch so it's in the same orientation as the photo above—that is, with three rows of three tags, with the holes facing you.
8. Solder a piece of the tinned wire to the bottom left and bottom middle tags.

9. Fantastic. Now remove the old footswitch and place the new footswitch in the vacated space.
10. Solder the brown wire (which is from the input socket) to the left-hand middle tag.
11. Solder the white wire (from the output socket) to the center tag.
12. Solder the blue wire (from the circuit output) to the middle top tag.
13. Solder the extended wire created in steps 3-5 above (which comes from the green circuit-input wire) to the left-hand top tag.
14. Marvelous—you now have true-bypass switching! Your tags should look like the pic below.



GO FORTH AND MODIFY

Although the four projects we've covered here are intended to be a simple introduction to the world of pedal modding, we're confident that after you complete one or more and hear, see, or feel the difference it makes, you'll be eager to do more. I recommend plugging into the giant super brain of the internet, which has a bounty of great mods available for the brave (of course, as with anything online, some are absolute tosh). As an initial port of call, I'd recommend geofex.com, fuzzcentral.ssguitar.com, and diystompboxes.com. Best of luck!

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PEDAL ROUNDUP

"Stompbox." The word just sounds *fun*. But, of course, it's what you *do* with pedals that matters. And we sure as heck wouldn't be cramming 37 reviews of the latest, greatest pedals into a single issue of *Premier Guitar* if stompboxes weren't, well, a foot-stomping good time.

It's little wonder that most of us guitarists and bassists are addicted to these things, because they can be downright magical, too. Put your foot down and *BAM!*—the whole world changes: A smoky roadhouse becomes a desert expanse at sunset ... a dusty country road becomes a vast and eerie underwater expanse ... a thunderstorm becomes an apocalyptic alien invasion. Pedals can transform our playing and inspire songs and/or new stylistic meanderings. And at their best, they are musical instruments in very same way that a bass or a guitar is.

The world of stompboxes you're about to enter is wild and varied. Here you'll find reinterpretations and refinements of pedals that have long been enshrined in the stompbox pantheon, wild beasts that can barely be tamed, keys to unexpected adventures in expression, and portals to sounds you didn't know you had at your fingertips. They come from legends in the guitar effects world such as Electro-Harmonix, Boss, and Vox, as well as established boutique builders like Strymon, Z.Vex, and Mad Professor—but you'll also discover boxes from rising stars like the guys at EarthQuaker Devices, Skreddy Pedals, and Stomp Under Foot, all of whom are building beautiful wares that stretch boundaries and take classic sounds to new heights.

It's a wild world that can leave you dizzy with possibilities. But we wouldn't have it any other way—and we don't think you would, either. In fact, we hope you've saved your pennies and dimes since last year's pedal spectacular, because we'll be flabbergasted if you don't find a reason to bust open your piggybank in these pages. So take a load off, take your time, sit back and enjoy this trip through the boundless land of magical music-making implements.

BURRISS
BOOSTIEST 2.5

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Rating:

Buy If...
you need a reasonably priced, great-sounding two-in-one pedal to suit your boost and overdrive needs.

Skip If...
you're joining a Slipknot cover band.

Burriss Amps
Street $175
burrissamps.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Burriss built its reputation on boutique amps, including the Royal Bluesman—which is highly regarded among tone connoisseurs such as Jimmy Vivino from TBS' late-night show *Conan*. (Check out our January 2011 Dirty Red review at premierguitar.com.) But, like many amp builders, Burriss has also branched out into the world of pedal manufacturing. The company recently released the Boostiest 2.5, which contains the same components as its discontinued Boostiest II but with a redesigned and streamlined internal PCB and simpler graphics, resulting in a more wallet-friendly price tag ($175 versus the Boostiest II's $225.)

Twice as Dirty

The Boostiest 2.5 is built around two independent sections called Overdrive and Boostier, both housed in a single enclosure. Burriss designed the unit to take up as little floor space as possible, and although there are two pedals in the rectangular casing, if you twist it sideways it's not much wider than a standard Boss pedal. The controls are arranged across the top of the surface area, with three knobs for each section. The Overdrive section features Gain, Tone, and Level controls, while the Boostier section has Output, Highs, and Input knobs. The latter works as a gain control, and Burriss recommends you set it and forget it. Input, output, and power supply jacks are side mounted.

Brotherly Love

Switches for both sections are true-bypass, and they share the same circuit board. The signal path goes through the Boostier section first, then to the Overdrive section, which picks up where the Boostier leaves off in terms of gain and touch response. I tested the Boostiest 2.5 with an Ernie Ball Music Man Axis Sport using several amps, including a Mesa/Boogie Lone Star Special head through a Marshall 1x12 cabinet, a Fender 1965 Deluxe Reverb, and an Ampeg SJ-12R. And it seemed like the Boostiest 2.5 was notably transparent—enhancing and preserving the character of the amp it was driving rather than imposing its own voice.

The Boostier side gives you approximately 20 dB of high-fidelity, clean boost to provide girth without significant tone coloration or unwanted grit—performing almost like a unity-gain buffer. Although the Overdrive side is inspired by the classic Ibanez TS808 circuit and even features the same JRC4558D chip, to my ears the Burriss sounds thicker and has less of a mid hump than the original Tube Screamer. You reach unity gain with the Gain control at around 8 o'clock, and from that point until about 11 o'clock you get a bit of extra bite and sustain on top of an essentially clean amp tone. From 12 o'clock on, the character changes and you get a very smooth overdrive that's liquid, yet articulate and responsive to dynamics. However, unless you're using a very high-gain amp, the Boostiest is a little too polite for extreme metal tones.

The Verdict

The Boostiest 2.5 is one of the best overdrive/boost pedals I've encountered. The Overdrive's lead sound, in particular, was outstanding through its entire range of Gain settings. And the transparency of the Boostier section is a treat if you love the sound of your amp. The fact that you get two pedals for the price of one is icing on the cake.

VHT V-DRIVE

BY DIMITRI SIDERIADIS

One of the best ways to make a distortion pedal stand out in a crowded market is to give the player more tone-shaping control than your average 3-knob stompbox. The trick is to enable more tweaking without sacrificing what's good about the pedal in the first place. The VHT V-Drive is a stompbox crammed with goodies, including a fundamentally unique method of tweaking the V-Drive's distortion character. And in doing so, the V-Drive almost turns the player into a pedal designer by enabling on-the-fly selection of clipping diode configurations—one of the fundamental aspects of a distortion pedal's voice.

Driven to Please

The first thing I noticed as I unboxed the V-Drive was the vast array of knobs. Aside from the standard Volume, Tone, and Drive controls, you get a Depth control that pinpoints the low frequency roll-off point, a Texture control for dialing in varying levels of harmonic content, and the Select knob, which handles diode-type switching and configuration. The sleeper in this mix is the voltage control, another unique feature that cuts or boosts the standard 9V power level.

After grabbing a Les Paul, I went straight for the Select switch and set it to position 11, which functions as a clean boost. With the diodes bypassed, I was curious to discover just how many little nasties might be added to my signal. I was impressed—the pedal was low in noise and very transparent. With my Champ's volume maxed out, the V-Drive's boost offered a significant increase in volume and a slight increase in gain, with increased high-end clarity. Switching to position 9 and setting the Drive to 5 yielded a slightly scooped classic overdrive, easily tailored through the Tone and Depth knobs. The Texture control was especially cool on this setting, and rolling it back a bit from the maximum smoothed out the sound considerably, moving it from bristly and biting to steamy and evil.

Power at your Fingertips

Things got really interesting when I reached to the back of the pedal and started fiddling with the voltage knob. Eric Johnson, Duane Allman, and many others have sung the virtues of powering pedals with drained batteries, and the V-drive allows you to experiment with this concept. Dropping the voltage down slightly gave my overdrive tone a wetter, warmer quality, while somehow becoming more visceral. Lowering it all the way down to 5 volts gave me a strangely cool buzzsaw sound that was eerie and dark in dropped-D tuning. Even at low voltage, there was no loss of gain or sustain.

With the Drive knob on 4 and the voltage at a middle setting, I switched to position 3 on the Select control. Suddenly I had a convincing Trey Anastasio lead tone, rich with Tube Screamer-like, midrangey rasp. Juicing up the voltage knob to just shy of the 16-volt maximum dramatically increased the treble response and tightness. And as I increased the Drive and Texture controls, the tone erupted with awesome feedback and ringing musical harmonics. The ability of this pedal to simulate the complexity and sustain of fully saturated tubes is excellent, and I was further impressed by the fact that it stayed faithful to the sound of my instrument. Even at the highest gain settings, the resonant and open-sounding character of my bolt-on Peavey Session guitar was distinct.

The Verdict

In total, the V-Drive is a sonically inspiring tool and its many voices encourage musical exploration. It's not only fun and intuitive from a usability standpoint, but conceptually exciting as well. Knowing you've got the freedom to modify the electronics under the hood is a great leap forward in the democratization of tone.

Rating:

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VHT Amplification

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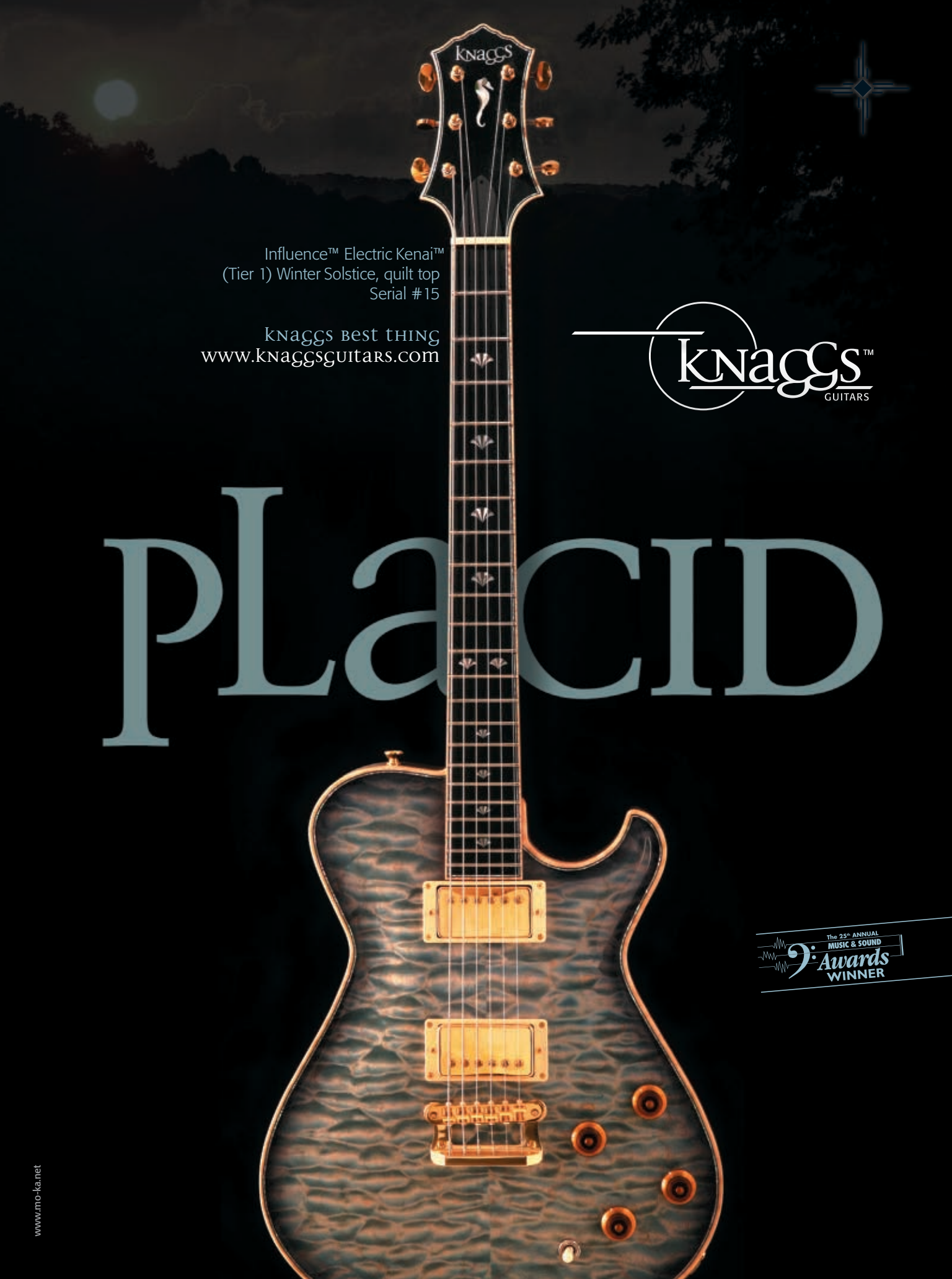
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BY STEVE OUIMETTE

Rating:

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you don't have the need for all that distortion.

Mad Professor
Street $169
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CLICKHere...
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Finland's Mad Professor has always found favor with front-line tone obsessives like Marc Ford and Pete Anderson by building more than simple clones. Instead of following trends, the company has built pedals that capitalized on subtle differences and less-explored formulas—particularly in the realm of overdrive.

The Stone Grey, however, is Mad Professor's path of entry into the world of modern high-gain and heavy distortion. Björn Juhl and his team designed the Stone Grey to dish out gobs of gain with ultimate clarity and string-to-string definition. The result is a stompbox that will happily move from vintage high-gain zones to more contemporary metal territory with ease.

Mad and Molten

At the time of this review, I was working on a modern metal project that provided the perfect occasion to explore the mind of this particular Mad Professor, and I kicked off my exploration of the Stone Grey with a sweet, modern-metal combination of a Gibson Les Paul Baritone and a '70 Marshall Super Bass. With the Super Bass set up fairly clean, the Stone Grey kicked out a big, heavy, and tight metal sound with a super-satisfying bottom-end chunk. The Tone knob was very effective for dialing in just the right amount of crunch without getting brittle. And the Distort control can be dimed without losing crucial definition. Staccato, rapid-fire metal riffs were ultra defined and still retained the basic character of the Marshall.

Moving over to a Stratocaster, I switched up the knob-setting recipe by cranking the Volume and backing the Distortion way down. This setup is the ticket to a muscular Stratocaster sound that flirts with Hendrix's and SRV's heavier sounds and crosses over into overdrive territory. It's hard not to be impressed by this aspect of the pedal's flexibility. Most distortion pedals that excel in high-gain territory fall apart when working like an overdrive. But the Stone Grey is rangey enough to cover both.

I'm a sucker for stoner rock and old-school Montrose, and the Stone Grey is just as willing to go there too. With a '74 Les Paul Custom, I jammed on "Rock the Nation" and "Rock Candy" before changing up the settings and hitting Mastodon's "Crack the Skye." It's almost impossible to play the latter convincingly without ample string clarity and punishing distortion, but the Mad Professor kept up on both fronts without a hitch.

Most 3-knob distortion pedals leave me wishing I had access to more EQ options, particularly bass and mids. The Tone control on the Stone Grey, though, is surprisingly effective and complete. As long as you're using a solid foundation for the amp, there is no need for additional knobs. While edgy, the Tone control doesn't get crispy, and backing off won't make things dull and dark.

The Verdict

The Stone Grey is a distortion pedal that doesn't step on the amp's tone, it just gives it a shot of adrenalin that can range from massive to more mellow. The tight bottom end enables you to play at killing speed without loss of definition. The sheer amount of distortion you can generate without creating harmonic mud is astounding, and the effective tone control can add even more bite. Clearly the Professor is Mad, but if this pedal is any evidence, I think he might just be a little bit pissed too.

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CARL MARTIN
BLUE RANGER

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Rating:

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Skip If...
you're expecting a repackaged Tube Screamer.

Carl Martin
Street $135
carlmartin.com

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Though Danish pedal, amplifier, and rack-effect builder Carl Martin enjoys a reputation as a sort of volume boutique builder, the company has built effects for the working musician for years. The recently released Vintage Series, which is built in China, are among his most accessible yet. And the Blue Ranger (which Martin himself allegedly decided to build after a good, long stare at the Stevie Ray Vaughan statue in Austin, Texas) is the latest addition to this line.

Hip and Handy

Housed in a distinct, royal blue case with cream-colored knobs and an '80s video-game-type font, the Blue Ranger would make a handsome addition to just about any pedalboard. The control layout consists of knobs for Drive, Tone, and Level, and a true-bypass footswitch. The back of the pedal is covered with a carpet-like surface that's ready to be attached to the 'board with Velcro—a pretty convenient design feature. You do, however, have to remove the screws from the four corners of the pedal's rear to get to the battery. That's not as convenient, but most players these days use external AC power supplies.

Full Range Drive

I tested the Blue Ranger using an Ernie Ball Music Man Axis Sport through a Fender Super-Sonic head and 4x12 cabinet. Initially, I had a hard time dialing up a setting that sounded as full as I like. And by itself, the Blue Ranger's voice is less organic and amp-like than I prefer. With a live band, however, the Blue Ranger cut through the mix beautifully, and what sounded a little harsh in isolation really came to life in the group context.

With the Drive all the way off, the Blue Ranger added grit that did wonders for my thin-sounding single-coil pickup setting and supplied heft without dirtying up the tone too much. Nudging the Drive up between 11 and 1 o'clock and switching to humbuckers gave chords an open and airy AC/DC-like crunch, much to my surprise. Goosing the Gain gave me a more compressed sound. And while turning up the Blue Ranger's Drive adds a lot more dirt, it also increases the volume noticeably, and when maxed, the pedal gets pretty unruly, bringing you very nearly into the realm of distortion. Compared to the granddaddy of Stevie Ray pedals—the Ibanez Tube Screamer—I found the Blue Ranger to be less transparent, more aggressive, and much louder than a Tube Screamer. This pedal definitely longs to be heard. The Blue Ranger also puts out a lot of highs. Even with the Tone knob all the way off it was as bright as my Tube Screamer is at about 2 o'clock.

The Verdict

Although ostensibly an overdrive pedal, the Blue Ranger's character is often more akin to a distortion pedal. It's nowhere near as reserved as Ibanez's famous green pedal and can roar like a beast if you need it to. But for having a more aggressive voice, it's a much more individual pedal. If you're looking for yet another Tube Screamer clone, the Blue Ranger might be too in-your-face. But if you are looking for an overdrive pedal that isn't quite as subdued, the Blue Ranger may be the trigger-happy Lone Ranger you're looking for, too.

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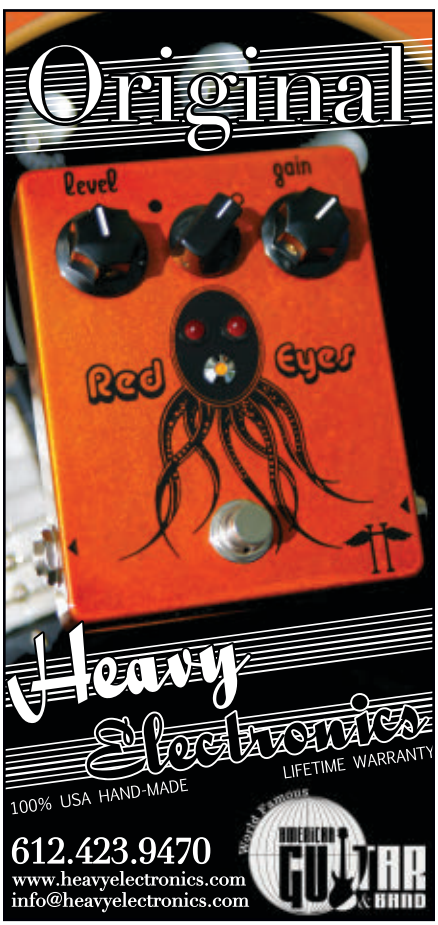

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VIRGO OVERDRIVE

BY STEVE OUIMETTE

Rating:

Buy If...
you want thick, defined, and versatile overdrive for your humbuckers and Marshalls.

Skip If...
you're more of a fuzz player.

Celestial Effects
Street $199
celestialeffects.com

CLICKHere...
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Though technically a division of the well-established Thermalogic Corporation, a Massachusetts-based supplier of electronic controls and sensors, Celestial Effects is a newcomer to the pedal world. But don't let the big parent company fool you. Celestial's Chief Designer, Dom Mancini, has been making, modifying, and repairing guitars, pedals, and tube amps for over 25 years, and his pedals are handbuilt in the USA to what you could safely call boutique standards. The Virgo Overdrive reviewed is the rock overdrive member of the five-pedal Celestial line.

Astrological Control Freak

Housed in a blue powder-coated box adorned with graphic representations of its associated astrological sign and a young lass who seems to have misplaced her clothes, the Virgo has four clearly labeled knobs for Volume, Tone, Edge, and Gain. These are augmented with a 3-way switch that selects between a pair of silicon diodes (position 1), no diodes (position 2), and an asymmetrical combination of a MOSFET and germanium diode (position 3). Standard input and output jacks are located at the top front of the Virgo with a 9V or 18V power input between them. The switch is true bypass.

A Bucker's Best Friend

The Virgo loves humbuckers and Marshalls, which I found out when I fired up my Les Paul R8 and 1970 Super Bass through a '68 basketweave 4x12 cab housing Celestion Vintage 30s and G12H-30s in an X-pattern. I set up the Virgo in MOSFET/germanium mode, cranked the Gain, Tone, and Edge knobs, and the immediate result was '60s and '70s saturated goodness. It's easy to extract Leslie West vibes and early Montrose tones that are incredibly brawny and inspiring.

In general, the Volume control seems to thicken a guitar's sound as much as boost your signal, though the boost becomes much more detectable in the more extreme ranges of the Volume control's travel.

Setting the 3-way switch to a no-diode setting, pulling the Gain down, and cranking the Volume yielded a tighter, more focused overdrive that sounded a lot like my amp on steroids. It's a killer setup for hard-rock rhythm and slightly boosted solos. This was one of my favorite modes, and I could see using this pedal extensively in the studio for tracking to take advantage of the tight and defined overdrive.

The dual-silicon setting offered a smoother sound that was slightly less responsive to my pick attack. In this mode, I found I could darken the tone in a very cool way by bringing down the Edge and Tone. References to Clapton's '60s "woman tone" are not always apt, but that's exactly what you get in this setting, and I absolutely loved the way it cut through on notes without sounding sharp.

The Verdict

Celestial Effects has not stumbled blindly into the pedal business. It's clear that the Virgo's designers have carefully analyzed what it takes to make a great classic-rock tone—and then they've given you a little more width to work with. The pedal is beautifully quiet, which is fortuitous, considering how well it works as a boost. If you have a big amplifier and a humbucker-equipped axe, you'll likely come to believe the Virgo is your sign—beause it's a sure ticket to sweetly sustaining heaven à la Cream-era Clapton.

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Jeff Stinco & Sébastien Lefebvre of
SIMPLE PLAN
May 2011
Planet Studios - Montreal, Quebec
Canada's Simple Plan is known for their classic punk energy and addictive pop hooks. The band has been hard at work working on their fourth studio album, "Get Your Heart On!" which features collaborations with Weezer's Rivers Cuomo, Natasha Bedingfield, K'NAAN, and others. To achieve an array of perfect tones for their new album, guitarists Jeff and Sébastien trusted T-Rex Effects.
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CATALINBREAD NAGA VIPER

BY LYLE ZAEHRINGER

Rating:

Buy If...

you're looking for a versatile boost that evokes the seminal Rangemaster, but adds a little more color and grit.

Skip If...

you're already sufficiently boosted.

Catalinbread

Street $169

catalinbread.com

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Never as extroverted as say, the Fuzz Face, the Dallas Rangemaster has always been the retiring and modest wallflower of classic pedals. But that doesn't mean its impact—or voice—has been anything less than huge. Its contribution to the cutting tones of players like Brian May and Rory Gallagher is undeniable. And Catalinbread uses the Rangemaster as square one for the design of the Naga Viper—a treble boost with a little something extra.

Deceptively Simple

A tube amp on the verge of overdriving itself is the ideal setting for any boost pedal. In this environment, clean boosts can do a great job of bumping an amp into overdrive territory for a solo or heavy rhythm part, though they can also muddy the low end. A Rangemaster-style treble boost produces a less spongy, muddy overdrive in the amplifier, making it a great tool for creating cutting tones and pushing your signal to the front of the mix.

Like the Dallas Rangemaster (and most boost pedals, for that matter), the Catalinbread Naga Viper is dead simple. There's a bypass footswitch and Boost, Range, and Heat controls ,all in a bright, custard-yellow stompbox that's tough to miss on your pedalboard.

Treble Rebel

With my Gibson SG connected to the Naga Viper and a Fender Bassman, and all the pedal's controls at noon, my first impression was a significant decrease in low end. By lowering the Range control, however, I was able to open up the low end without changing the high-frequency response. Even with the Range at its lowest setting, the Naga Viper still cuts some of the low frequencies, evoking the sound of a clean JCM800 Marshall.

With the Boost control dimed, the Naga Viper delivers roughly 10 dB of gain—plenty for sending a Bassman into a biting, articulate overdrive. But using the Heat control, you can shape the boosted signal even further. The Heat control is essentially an internal gain circuit, and while it produces no additional dB increase in the output, it creates the perception of a much louder, hotter signal. As the Heat control is increased, the signal becomes noisier and more compressed (which is pretty common for this type of effect), but it also adds presence and articulation to note attacks. And at its highest settings, it introduces a pleasing, hissy distortion. Like the Range control, the Heat function has a way of making a 6L6 or 6V6 amp sound a lot like a Marshall—that's pretty cool for such a simple pedal.

The Verdict

With most boosters, you're not going to get a lot of additional tonal versatility from the unit itself. Yet with the Naga Viper, Catalinbread gives treble-boost fans a few extra shades of color to work with. If you're a veteran treble-boost user, it's a great way to expand on the sonic territory you already know. But for first-time treble-boost users in particular, the Naga Viper offers a rewarding introduction to the immense possibilities of boost.

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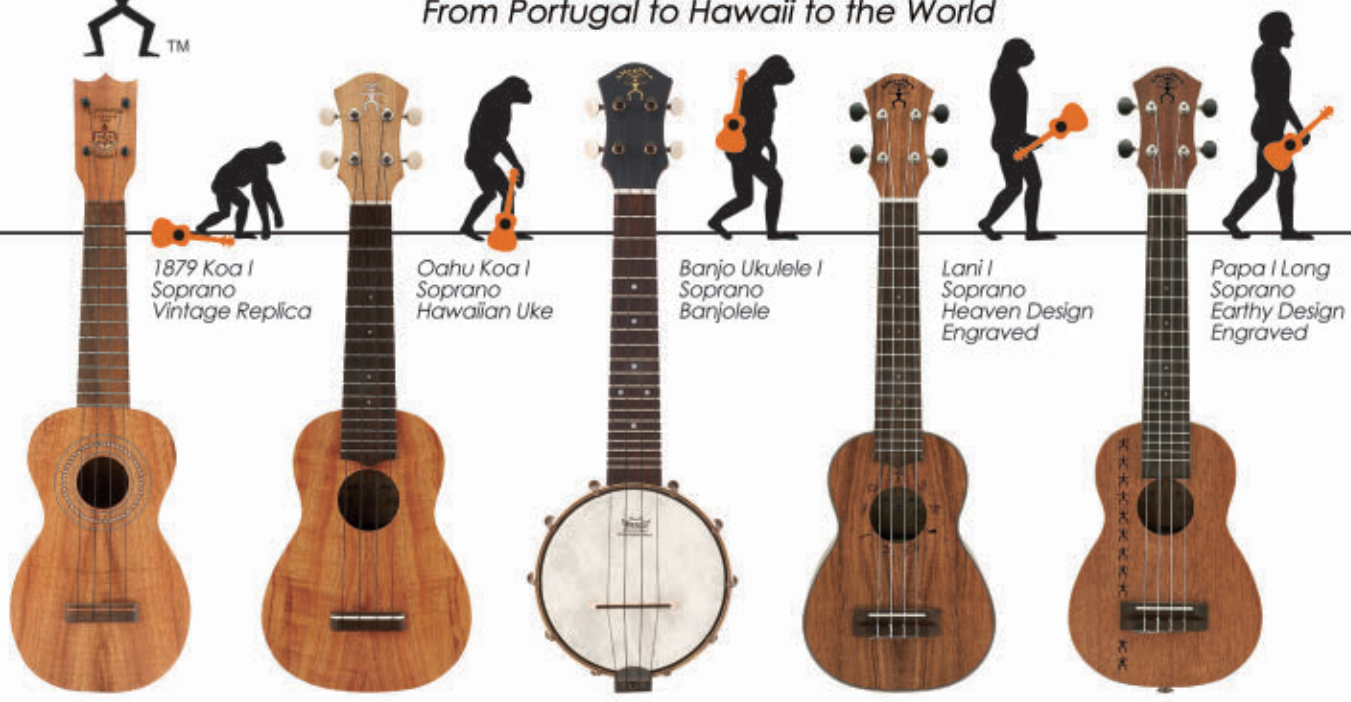

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EMPRESS EFFECTS COMPRESSOR

BY JORDAN WAGNER

Ottawa, Ontario-based Empress Effects doesn't rest on its laurels. Founder and electronics wiz Steve Bragg heads up a five-person outfit that struck gold with their Superdelay, Phaser, and Multidrive pedals—stompboxes that have developed a loyal cult following. Their newest creation, the all-analog Compressor, is built to deliver studio-grade performance and studio-style features in a stompbox. The design places an emphasis on tone control and transparency that you don't see in a typical stompbox compressor.

My Kingdom for a Ratio Control

Most of the definitive stompbox compressors feature a much simpler control set than the Empress, so many guitarists may have never encountered some of the features it offers. But it can be a very intuitive pedal once you've dedicated a little time to exploring its potential. And the five knobs and two switches enable you to explore myriad variables, and then shape and squeeze your sound with relative ease.

Three different compression ratios—2:1, 4:1, and 10:1—can be applied using the 3-way switch at the top left of the case. An adjacent 10-level LED meter shows the amount of input volume, gain reduction, or both at the same time, depending on how you've set a second 3-way switch.

Guitar input gain is adjusted via an Input control, and compression is shaped using Attack (the speed of the compression reaction), Release (how fast the compressor lets go of the signal), Mix (which lets you blend straight and processed signals), and Output controls. Empress even included the ability to shape the compressor signal with an outboard effect—such as a high-pass filter to keep the compressor from affecting hard-hit lower notes on a bass—via a 1/4" side-chain jack. A 9V power supply is required to run the unit, so you'll have to ditch your batteries in favor of a wall wart.

The Empress' New Tones

With a Fender Blacktop Telecaster and Fender '65 Twin Reverb reissue, the Compressor's transparency was readily apparent. But the unit's ability to improve note definition was equally impressive. Savvy guitarists and studio engineers often use compressors to enhance note separation in chordal passages, and at the 4:1 ratio setting the Empress yielded a discernable yet subtle improvement without spoiling the magical Telecaster-meets-Twin tone. Switching to the 10:1 compression ratio left me floored at some of the poppin' country tones that were emanating from my Twin.

Rating:

Buy If...

only total control over your compression will suffice.

Skip If...

you like your compressor a lot simpler.

Empress Effects

Street $249

empresseffects.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

The real treat of the Compressor is the effectiveness of the Attack and Release controls and how well they worked together. Their effect can be subtle if you're accustomed to listening for things like the amount of midrange grit and high-end cut in your tone, rather than how smoothly the sustain decays. But once you get a feel for how these two controls tailor those aspects of your sound, you'll be amazed by how you can fine-tune your tone to a stage or studio environment—or even a different guitar and amplifier combination. It's a highly adaptable tool.

As fun as the Compressor is, it has the potential to be a little daunting to a player who hasn't worked much with compression. Musicians who've invested time with home recording rigs will probably be more comfortable learning the pedal's capabilities. But a little time spent with the instruction manual and some practice with various amp/guitar combinations at different volumes will reveal this pedal's utility.

The Verdict

Empress' blue-sparkle box is not only a great pedal compressor, it's one of the best on the market today. The amount of control is fantastic—even if it presents a bit of a learning curve—and the tone is exceptionally transparent. Players who haven't yet discovered what compression can do for their tone are in for a treat. Spending an hour with the Empress may leave them wondering how they lived without it.

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G&L BUCKSHOT

BY AL SANTANGELO

Rating:

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you want natural, clear overdrive that will add some serious heat to your sound without masking your guitar's voice.

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When it comes to overdrive, there's a fine line between dirty and *too* dirty. More often than not, you want an overdrive to retain some aspect of your guitar's voice. So it's little wonder that a company like G&L, which has made so many well balanced and versatile guitars over its history, hit the mark in creating a natural overdrive that goes from smooth to sizzling, all while retaining the character of both amp and guitar.

Back to Basics

Things don't get much more straightforward than the Buckshot. The sturdy metal body—which is painted in a brown that might well be a nod to Leo Fender's early '60s amplifiers—has three knobs for Volume, Tone, and Drive. The bottom of the pedal has to be removed to change batteries, so you'll need a screwdriver or enough forethought to toss in a fresh 9V cell before heading off to a gig. But the pedal comes with an AC adapter, which acknowledges that most players will probably run the Buckshot from their pedalboard anyway. Construction quality is excellent, and the controls and jacks are all handwired with care.

Clean and Roomy

Out in front of a 100-watt Marshall and with a Duncan Distortion-equipped Dean V 79 or Schecter C-1 Elite on the driving end, the Buckshot provides an almost clean boost with just a hint of grit at the lower Drive settings. Turning up the Drive knob adds heat to the notes very quickly, but without any booming volume changes. Increasing the drive also tightens up the sound with a sort of natural compression that sacrifices little in terms of clarity.

Even with the Buckshot's Drive control pushed to the max, note-to-note clarity remained excellent, and chords that would otherwise be buried in overdriven mud were rich and distinct. That said, experimenting with various drive and tone values enabled me to go from smooth to quite crunchy—like moving from Skynrd to Deep Purple to Nugent to Green Day—with a few twists and a change in attack. Given that the pedal is an overdrive, it's no surprise that there's not enough edge for metal, but in front of a raging amp it would do wonders there, too. I also found that keeping the Tone control around the midpoint or higher is essential to retaining the high-end that makes this pedal shine—going much lower comes at the expense of clarity.

Responsiveness to picking nuance is excellent—you get back what you put in, and there's a lot of room for a dynamic approach. Decreasing the Volume doesn't cost you much in terms of tone either, which makes it easy to dial in a sweet, slightly overdriven tone at lower club levels.

The Verdict

The G&L Buckshot provides a great, natural overdrive that's diverse enough to handle country to blues to hard rock, while letting amps' and pickups' natural voices shine through. If you have a guitar and amplifier setup you love, but that occasionally needs a touch more horsepower, the Buckshot is an overdrive that won't get in the way.

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BLACK CAT BEE BUZZ

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

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Rating:

Buy If...
a combination of stinging '60s fuzz and crunchy heft has thus far eluded you.

Skip If...
all but modern, high-gain distortion is useless to you.

Black Cat Pedals
Street $225
blackcatpedals.com

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or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Fuzz, and I mean *real* fuzz—the nasty, buzzing stuff of "Satisfaction" and Davie Allan biker soundtracks—is a tricky little beast to wrangle. Though it sounds cool as hell on records of the '60s, dealing with the tangle of high-mid frequencies in loud live settings can leave listeners writhing in agony under a squall of feedback. What's more, the simple circuits of the '60s that best copped that sound are chronically unreliable, unpredictable, and at this point, often locked up in the closets of hoarding collectors.

It doesn't leave a fuzz fiend with many places to turn. But the recently resurrected Black Cat Bee Buzz is a brilliant beam of stinging light in the world of brawny, super high-gain fuzzes. What's best is that with the flip of a switch it transforms into a meatier Muff-like fuzz that can run with those tigers too.

Born Again Bee Baa

The Bee Buzz was born when Black Cat's Japanese distributor requested a clone of the rare and coveted Roland Bee Baa, which was introduced in the mid '70s. Black Cat did another run of 50 for domestic consumption, which disappeared at a rate that suggested they might be onto a winner.

There's about a million reasons to love this thing if you love fuzz. For starters, it packs a ton of functions in a very small enclosure—about a third as big as an original Bee Baa. It's also crazy-cool looking. Our test version came in what Black Cat calls Candy Red, but you can also order it up in Candy Blue, Denim Blue, Coppertone, and a wonderfully shocking Limonade.

The control set consists of four knobs, a small switch for switching between Buzz and the much gnarlier Bee setting, a bypass footswitch, and another that switches between the fuzz and boost sections. The three leftmost knobs are for the fuzz section. Volume controls the effect level, Tone ups the sting quotient, and Sustain enables you to pile on the fuzz.

The Bear and the Bee Hive

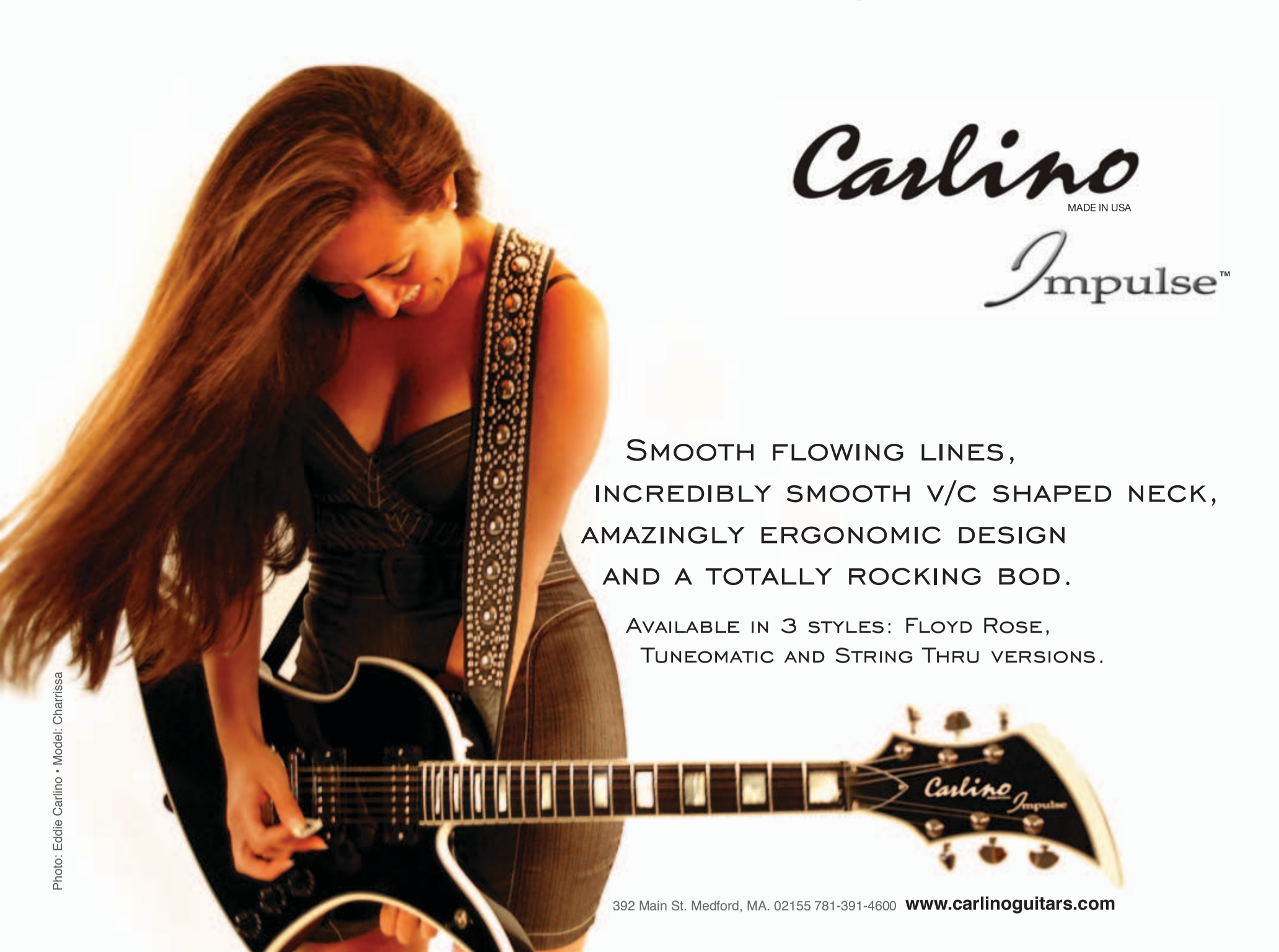
The Bee setting on the Bee Buzz' fuzz circuit is downright wicked. It will transform an otherwise clean and well-groomed Fender Jaguar and Vibroverb into a filthy garage punk thug. But the beauty of the Black Cat's Bee section is that even the most mosquito-like fuzz has muscle and backbone if you put enough Volume behind it. More surprisingly, it's resistant to feedback in a way that similarly grimy fuzzes are not, which means you can actually employ the most radical version of the effect in a pretty loud band context.

Flip to the Buzz setting and the Bee Buzz reveals another surprise—a burlier, fatter fuzz that combines the voice of the Bee section with an almost Big Muff/Fuzz Face hybrid tone that you can use for more aggressive Black Sabbath and Stooges chording and Hendrixian leads. It's not afraid of a big amp either, and will happily punish a higher-wattage amp and a pair of 12" speakers without turning into a screeching feedback machine. It doesn't have quite as much gain or push as a Muff, Fuzz Face, or Rat, but if your amp has enough headroom, it can sound very mean in very loud settings. If there's a limitation in the fuzz section, it's that for clean and powerful amps, you'll have to keep the effect's Volume up pretty high to prevent a volume cut. On the other hand, this probably isn't a pedal for those seeking less aggressive shades.

The boost section isn't, as the name suggests, a clean boost or a treble boost like that on the original Bee Baa. But it's a great—if somewhat monochromatic—overdrive that works especially well on small amplifiers.

The Verdict

There aren't many fuzz boxes quite as versatile as the Bee Buzz. Granted, that assertion assumes an affinity for the scrungy sounds of '60s fuzz, which is far from every player's cup of tea. But if that's a trip you're psyched to take without leaving your bigger, brawnier fuzz tones behind, this Black Cat is your ride.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MOJO HAND COLOSSUS

BY MATTHEW HOLLIMAN

Rating:

Buy If...

you're fed up with a shadowy midrange in Muffs.

Skip If...

you like the archaic vibe of vintage Muffs.

Mojo Hand FX

Street $160

mojohandfx.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Ever since the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff was first introduced in 1969, it has been a polarizing stompbox. Reviled by some and hailed by others as the Golden God of fuzz, the Big Muff—in its various EHX and Sovtek incarnations—has had a hand in shaping some of the mightiest tones in rock history. Numerous companies now offer clones and DIY kits that replicate the sound of the Big Muff at virtually every stage of its evolution. Mojo Hand FX, however, based it's Colossus Fuzz on the Sovtek Big Muffs of the early '90s, which until recently tended to be regarded as the homely stepsister of the Big Muff family.

More Mojo Control

Unlike an old Sovtek Muff, which has controls for Volume, Sustain, and Tone, the Colossus has four knobs—Tone, Gain, Volume, and a fourth labeled Mid, and each has a considerable impact on the tone. The Colossus will get very bass heavy when the Tone control is turned counterclockwise, but will serve up plenty of treble on the opposite end of the dial. Players who've been frustrated by the lack of tonal range in some Big Muffs will be especially excited by the Colossus' Mid control. Some Muffs—especially the Sovtek versions—can get lost in a band setting, but rolling up some of the Mids on the Colossus finds the pedal cutting like a firebrand through the mix. You won't be at a loss for level either. At 75-percent full, the Volume provides more than enough output for burning leads.

Apart from the Mid control, the real secret weapon on this fuzz ship is a 3-way voicing switch mounted between the four knobs. Flipped straight up, there's a hint of bass cut. The middle position emphasizes the mids and seems to give the Mid control itself a little more focus, and the down position gives a kick to the low-mids. This extra control is great if you move between amplifier types or single-coils and humbuckers, and the switch helps you compensate for low- or high-end emphasis in your rig without sacrificing any of the fuzzy heft in the Colossus' voice.

Mojo Hand FX took some care in designing this piece, which is evident not only in the psychedelic art and rugged construction, but also under the hood as well. The guts aren't too cluttered, there's ample space for the 9V battery (the pedal also has a 9V barrel input), and the jacks are well shielded. This is a totally roadworthy pedal.

I tested the Colossus with a Gibson Les Paul and a Fender '65 Twin Reverb Reissue. Starting with the toggle switch in the downmost position and a boost in the Mids and Tone, I was treated to a very explosive, classic Russian Muff lead—big across the whole tone spectrum and huge in the bottom end. Pulling down some of the Gain rounds off the tone, which is a little more reminiscent of older Muffs. The Les Paul was perfect for this pedal, with the hot humbuckers jetting the fuzz into desert-rock bliss. Flicking the toggle switch up and adding some extra gain was like taking a trip on Ted Nugent's tour bus in the late '70s.

The Verdict

At $149, the Colossus is a great find and a pretty solid deal for anyone on the hunt for Sovtek Muff tone in a sturdier package. But when the EQ toggle and Mid control are used carefully, the Colossus also does a fair job of approximating older Muff tones. It may not quite be the be-all, end-all in the quest for vintage Muff replacement as Mojo Hand claims, but it's much more affordable than vintage units. The Colossus will cough up the goods for everyone from Gilmour fans seeking butter smooth *Pulse*-era tones to stoner-rock aficionados who jam in basements adorned with black-light posters, making this one very wide-ranging fuzz.

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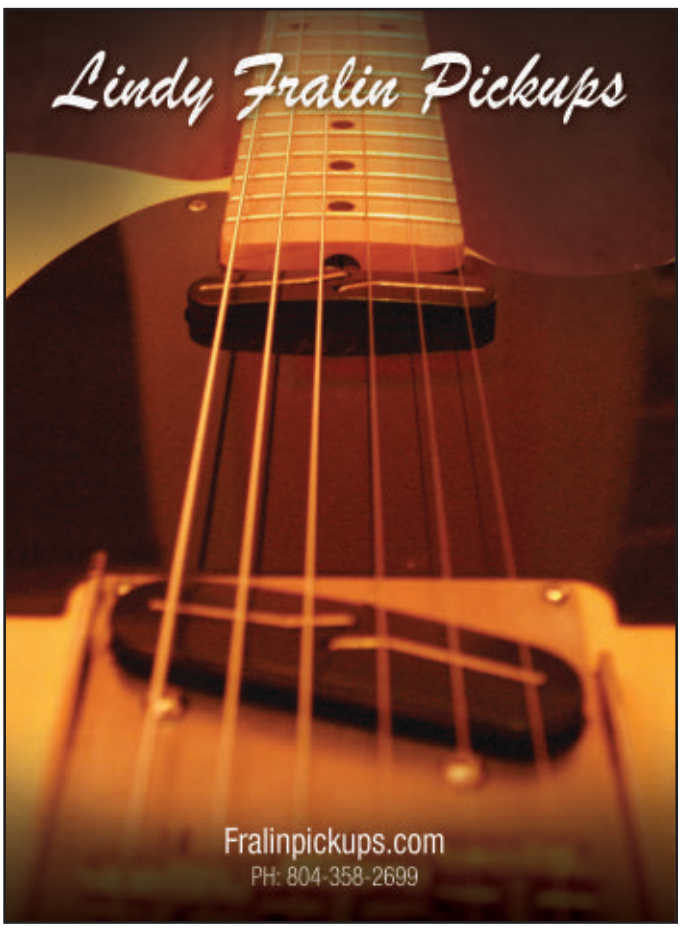

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MID-FI ELECTRONICS
DEMO TAPE FUZZ

BY LYLE ZAEHRINGER

Rating:

Buy If...
you've always wanted that grungy, lo-fi tone popular in the 1990s.

Skip If...
you never look back on the era of the cassette with fondness.

Mid-Fi Electronics
Street $225
midfielectronics.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Many of the electric guitar's great tone innovations were discovered by some adventurous soul twisting a knob just a bit beyond where it was intended to go. That kind of attitude—or ignorance—can often lead to greatness, and in the case of the humble 4-track cassette recorder, it was responsible for some very cool sounds. Those sounds are the inspiration behind Mid-Fi Electronics' Demo Tape Fuzz.

As recently as the '90s, amateur recording still relied on the 4-track cassette recorder. And though ambitious recordists could get great sounds out of 4-tracks, the intrinsic compressed nature of cassette tapes could lend an attractive, sometimes crackling roughness. When players upped the compression quotient by plugging their guitar directly into the 4-track's mic preamp and cranked the gain, the resulting fuzz tones could be downright nasty. This lo-fi, overdriven mic preamp tone is what Mid-Fi Electronics is shooting for in the Demo Tape fuzz.

Tape Appeal

Dressed down with colorless, rough-hewn graphics and a cassette-like image—complete with chicken-scratched control names—the Demo Tape looks punk rock before you ever plug it in. The unit is powered via standard DC adapter and is true bypass. The controls include Bass, Treble, Volume, and Trim. The latter control, of course, was the key to sending tracks into the red on your average 4-track, and it's just as vital here.

Tape Me Back

First things first: Just because the Mid-Fi unit specializes in the skuzzy sounds of a home-brewed punk cassette, it doesn't mean there's not a lot of other very cool fuzz sounds on tap. Dialing up a more typical fuzz tone with the Trim slightly above noon, the Treble slightly below noon, and a touch of Bass recalls no less than my recent vintage Germanium 4 Big Muff Pi with a little more compression, which is great for heavy rock leads and rhythm alike. The pedal is also extremely touch-sensitive at these settings and the response to input dynamics is amazingly expressive. The Volume control produces plenty of boost in the output too, allowing you to blend the Demo Tape's overdrive with your amp's own grit when you roll the Trim and Treble back.

At more extreme settings, however, you experience the unique sonic qualities that set this pedal apart. With the Demo Tape positioned between my Fender Strat and a silverface Fender Super Bassman, and the Trim knob turned up a little more aggressively, the Demo Tape's distortion is a deliciously abrasive and highly compressed wall-o-fuzz. The Demo Tape can also get extremely bright, and rolling up the Treble will take you well beyond where most treble controls stop. This capability can be painful if you're running your Stratocaster via the Demo Tape into a cranked Fender Twin Reverb. But used with care, it's extremely useful for moving key instruments to the front of the mix and can add some killer '60s garage-punk tones to your palate.

The Verdict

Running a guitar directly into a console preamp is a technique nearly as old as multitrack recording itself. But like the 4-track cassette itself, the sound of an overdriven cassette multitracker is an unjustly maligned and neglected tone. The Mid-Fi Demo Tape may not always perfectly nail the fizziest and most compressed aspects of that sound, but it certainly captures the spirit and a lot of the sonic payoff of that approach. It also delivers a lot of very usable and more conventional fuzz tones—a feat that should leave fuzz fans very impressed.

Photo: www.marklatham.co.uk

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STOMP UNDER FOOT
RED MENACE

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

Rating:

Buy If...

you're equally in love with Sovtek Big Muffs and early Electro-Harmonix versions, but can't figure out which way to turn.

Skip If...

you think fuzz should buzz like a hornet.

Stomp Under Foot

Street $160

stompunderfoot.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Though they're a minority in the bizarre community of Big Muff nuts, some consider Mike Matthews' early Sovtek creations the finest Muffs of all time. The perception is no doubt fueled by David Gilmour's use of an early Sovtek Big Muff to power his leads on Pink Floyd's '94 tour and much-adored *Pulse* DVD. But they are, by any measure, great fuzz boxes.

Gilmour's *Pulse* Muff is nicknamed the Civil War model (for its blue and grey enclosure) and fuzz nerds consider it the first and best of all Sovtek Muffs. But the truth is that the very first Sovtek Muff wasn't a Muff at all—it was an almost identical pedal, misleadingly named the Red Army Overdrive.

It's little surprise that Stomp Under Foot, one of the foremost specialists in Muff clones, used this footnote in Big Muff history as the basis for the Red Menace. But what's cool about their effort to tackle this rare and subtly—but significantly—different circuit is that it results in one of the most well-rounded Big Muff clones on the market.

Red Scare

In terms of controls and construction, there isn't a whole lot to a Muff-style pedal, and anyone who has ever used a fuzz will know how to navigate the Red Menace. There's a knob for Volume, one for Tone, and another for Sustain, which is essentially the fuzz control.

Boasting an uncluttered interior, the pedal is beautifully built and flawlessly wired. And while the candy apple red enclosure doesn't have the visual allure of a Sovtek original (what does?), it looms boldly on a cluttered pedalboard—almost daring you to tussle, like a MiG prowling the edge of international airspace.

Eastern Bloc Rock

Because of minor variations in transistor values, the Sovtek Red Army Overdrive tends to have a little more scuzz to its fuzz and more midrange kick than a Civil War. These are the qualities that Stomp Under Foot emphasized in the Red Menace. The difference is critical, because while the big, round, and smooth low end of a Civil War may sound like Lava Lamp drops from heaven in a spacious arrangement, it can go missing in a raging stoner-rock maelstrom.

I played the Red Menace alongside a Stomp Under Foot Civil War using a Fender Vibroverb and Ampeg Super Jet, as well as a humbucker-equipped Telecaster Custom, a Rickenbacker 330, and an E-series Stratocaster. With Gilmour's more searing tones in my thoughts, I put the Red Menace between the Stratocaster and the Ampeg. Running through the funk section of Pink Floyd's "Echoes," the additional midrange edge and Fuzz Face/Triangle Muff-style rasp was plainly—and delightfully—audible. The extra presence comes with little sacrifice in the low-end muscle. And while the Red Menace isn't nearly as wooly as the Civil War at identical settings, the low end is fat and smooth enough for sweet sustained bends and droning, growling power chords alike.

Playing the super-resonant Rickenbacker showcased the Red Menace's capacity for note definition in a distorted context, and the pedal remained surprisingly clear during fast arpeggio work. Meanwhile, languid, elastic Sabbath-blues bends on the Telecaster's neck humbucker were a perfect match for the Red Menace's enhanced midrange and classic, harmonic-rich, and almost octave-like Muff voice.

The Verdict

If you've ever longed for a Big Muff or Muff clone but wondered whether you're a member of the round, wooly, and singing Sovtek camp or the original brutal and buzzier Electro-Harmonix tone family, the Stomp Under Foot Red Menace inhabits an interesting middle ground. While it's clearly more closely related to the former, you can dial in *plenty* of high-mid content to achieve the aims of the latter. There are few builders quite as well versed in Muffery as Stomp Under Foot. And in reinterpreting this lost stepchild of the Big Muff family, Stomp Under Foot has crafted a fuzz that's likely to find fans in less Muff-like contexts too.

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SKREDDY PEDALS LUNAR MODULE DELUXE

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Rating:

Buy If...
you're a Pink Floyd fanatic or just want a killer fuzz pedal.

Skip If...
you hate waiting lists.

Skreddy Pedals
Street $235
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CLICKHere...
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The Skreddy Pedals Lunar Module Deluxe is a true bypass fuzz/overdrive pedal based on the silicon Fuzz Face circuit, which wouldn't make it the first Fuzz Face clone on the block. But this Skreddy isn't based on any old Fuzz Face tone: It's inspired, in exacting—even obsessive—terms by David Gilmour's tone on "Time" from Pink Floyd's classic *The Dark Side of the Moon.*

The Deluxe is Skreddy-mastermind Marc Ahlfs' second attempt at perfecting Gilmour's Fuzz Face sound. The first Lunar Module was rapturously received by Gilmour fanatics. And like the first Lunar Module, the Deluxe is the result of playing the "Time" solo over and over and tweaking the pedal's response against it. The Deluxe, however, gives the player even more control over this notoriously hairy circuit with a variable-gain input transistor, as well as a tone control for added brilliance that's helpful for tailoring the pedal to different guitars and amps.

Moon Unit

The sparkly casing of the Lunar Module Deluxe features the three knobs found on the standard version—Volume, Fuzz, and Body, with the latter being a pre-distortion bass control. Below this set of controls are two knobs, labeled Brite (presence) and Range (pre-gain). These two controls were also available on the standard Lunar Module as trim pots. But the ability to tweak these controls on the fly is key to the Deluxe's performance, flexibility, and effectiveness in a variety of settings.

Taming the Beast

In their original incarnation, Fuzz Faces were finicky and temperamental, and also hard to manufacture consistently. While some units sound unbelievable, others border on awful. Fuzz Faces are also notorious for having impedance issues. Because of the Fuzz Face's low input impedance, if any other pedals or buffers are placed between it and the guitar, the sound can get very harsh. And with a wah placed inline, the signal can even go into oscillation. Vintage Fuzz Faces were also notoriously susceptible to radio interference. The Skreddy circuit is light years more stable, and an extra input stage (controlled by the Range knob) makes the Lunar Module Deluxe friendlier to other pedals.

Flexible Fuzz

Though the Lunar Module Deluxe's most direct inspiration is clear, that doesn't mean it won't do a whole lot more. To explore its capabilities, I tested the Skreddy using a Japanese Fender Strat and a Gibson Les Paul Standard through a vintage Ampeg Gemini II. I also added a Boss DD-2 pedal into the chain to get a little extra Gilmour vibe where appropriate.

Skreddy's focus on *Dark Side of the Moon* tones was not in vain. Copping Gilmour's simultaneously searing and singing tone was relatively easy with the Stratocaster's bridge pickup and a little delay, which I added without experiencing any additional noise.

But it's a killer pedal even if you're not a Gilmour aficionado, and works equally well with single-coils or humbuckers. Using my Strat, and with the Fuzz knob less than halfway up, Brite at 8 o'clock, and Body at 3 o'clock, I got a smooth overdrive that inspired me to play with a Jimi-meets-Scott Henderson vibe. Just as impressive was how well the guitar cleaned up when I rolled back the volume on either guitar. With a quick flick of my Les Paul's Volume knob, I transformed a Sabbath-like sludge into a gritty, but articulate clean sound.

While the Skreddy does an admirable job of taming the inherent squirreliness of a Fuzz Face-type circuit, that doesn't mean it's all buttery smooth. In loud settings this thing can still get raucous and verge on squealy. Be prepared to use your guitar's volume knob judiciously.

The Verdict

Demand for the Lunar Module and the Lunar Module Deluxe have, at times, well exceeded supply. And it's easy to see why. This pedal will help you nail one of the holiest tones in the rock canon, if that's your obsession. But it's a lot more than just a ticket to the Dark Side. The Lunar Module Deluxe is a great example of how a much-loved pedal design can evolve and be refined, and still deliver some surprises along the way.

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JACQUES STOMPBOXES
BLACK MAMBA

BY JORDAN WAGNER

Rating:

Buy If...

you're jonesing hard for old-school, '60s psychedelic fuzz that can sustain for days.

Skip If...

you need more range in your fuzz and need to mind your budget.

Jacques Effects

Street $498

jacqueseffects.com

CLICKHere...

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France's Jacques Effects enjoys the distinction of being among the most highly regarded boutique pedal makers outside of the United States. The company's line of compact, handmade stompboxes are known for their wild tones and over-the-top voicings and are favorites of adventurous players from Reeves Gabrels to Jerry Donahue. Even with that track record, they tout their newest pedal—the Black Mamba Fuzz—as their masterpiece. And its design intent, which is to simulate Jimi Hendrix's classic Fuzz-Face-and-cranked-Marshall combination, takes aim at one of the holy grails of guitar sound. It's also likely to be the company's rarest pedal: With nearly unobtainable new-old-stock NPN Valvo OC141 transistors at the heart of this monster, Jacques will only be able to build five.

Venomous Concept

The Black Mamba has a sparse control layout, to say the least. And with little reference to how its three knobs work and an unconventional layout that deviates from the common Volume/Fuzz/Tone array, I found myself wishing they'd been labeled. On the Black Mamba, two knobs control the gain levels—one for the germanium transistors and the other for a cranked plexi Marshall emulation. The bottom knob sets the pedal's output level.

Jacques based the Black Mamba, to some extent, on his Mercer and Wercer distortion pedals. The primary difference is the Valvo OC141 germanium transistors and a polarity flip that comes with the change from PNP to NPN transistors, which Jacques says enables a burlier tone. The sonic payoff is considerable.

At nearly 500 bucks, Jacques' mean little machine isn't a cheap one, which is why I had some concerns about the build quality. The input jack is a plastic barrel type like you see on Vox AC30s, while the sturdier output jack is metal. The wiring inside could've been routed more neatly, and the circuit board was wrapped in a leatherette pouch that had been stapled shut. In addition, the wiring connected to the LED was well soldered, but covered in red electrical tape wrappings instead of shrink tubing. Everything worked properly without a hitch, but for a pedal that commands this type of price—and one with such rare components inside—I expected tighter quality control under the hood.

Poison Control

However things may look inside the Mamba, the tones within are to die for. With a 2011 Fender American Stratocaster and a Fender '65 Twin Reverb Reissue, the fuzz tones that poured out of my neck pickup were thick, juicy, and blistering with harmonics. Sustain was incredible, allowing me to hold notes bent above the 12th fret and have them sing for what seemed like an eternity.

I had to explore some slightly unorthodox settings to get these tones, however. Jacques recommends that you max out both Gain controls and use the guitar's volume to sweep through the pedal's sonic palette. While I found this technique truly effective—and got some fantastic sounds ranging from razor-sharp fuzz to gritty cleans—it did leave me wishing there was a little more nuance available from the Mamba's onboard controls.

Still, the Black Mamba cleans up better than most fuzzes I've come across. And dropping my Strat's volume control to slightly above halfway yielded a crisp rhythm tone that was perfect for fast, 7th-chord vamping.

The Verdict

The Jacques Black Mamba packs some of the most fluid and dynamic Hendrix-style fuzz sounds I've heard in quite some time. The build could be better, but the incredible searing, psychedelic tones on tap cannot be denied. The big question is whether the cost is worth it, no matter what transistor is inside. But given the price of vintage fuzz units and the potential collectability of the Black Mamba, it could well prove to be worth every last cent to the right player.

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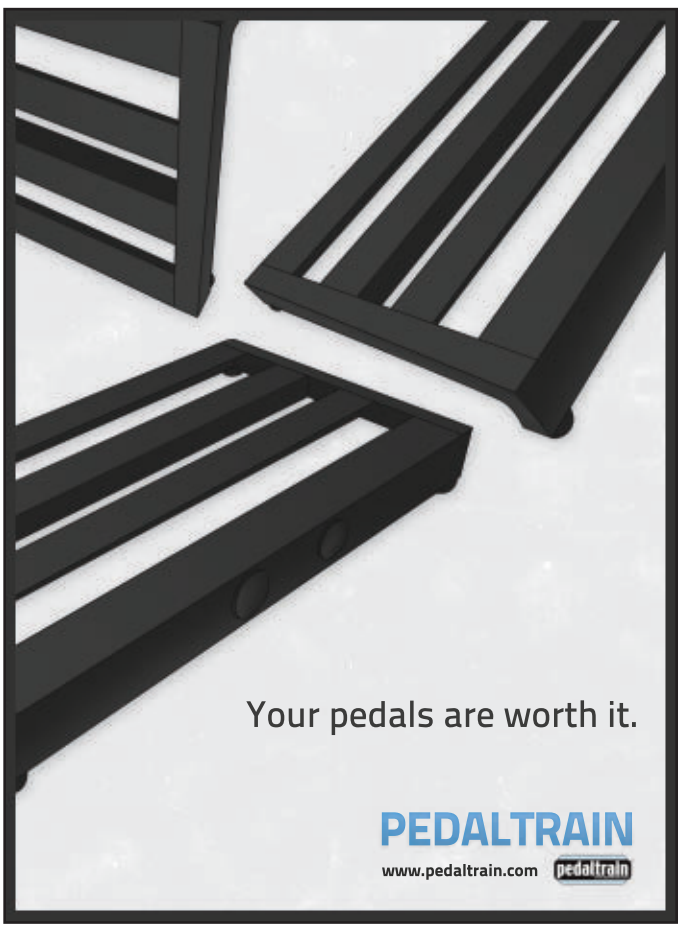
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ELECTRO-HARMONIX NEO MISTRESS

BY LYLE ZAEHRINGER

Rating:

Buy If...
you're looking for a compact, yet versatile and cool-sounding flange.

Skip If...
you need stereo functionality or require more tone-shaping control.

Electro-Harmonix
Street $89
ehx.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Like delay, flanging was born through creative use of magnetic tape machines. Applied to vocals and guitar, the unmistakable swirling effect of flanging helped define the sound of the psychedelic '60s. And though the effect was originally only obtainable in the studio by manipulating the speed of spinning tape reels, companies like A/DA, Electro-Harmonix, and Univox were building stompbox versions by the '70s. Electro-Harmonix's Electric Mistress remains among the most renowned of these units and remains in production to this day. With the release of the Neo Mistress, Electro-Harmonix has packed much of the punch of the original into the company's Nano-sized package for guitarists with limited pedalboard real estate.

Guaranteed to Blow Your Mind

With two knobs, an LED, and a footswitch, the Neo Mistress appears exceedingly simple. But like so many Electro-Harmonix stompboxes, there's more going on than meets the eye. Rate and Feedback controls enable adjustments of speed and intensity, but there's also a Filter Matrix Mode, similar to that found in the Electric Mistress, that enables you to create more unusual tones outside the realm of typical flanging.

With the Neo Mistress between my Gibson SG and a vintage Fender Bassman, I set both controls to 12 o'clock. The first thing I noticed was the slowly changing color of the status LED. At the lowest point in the flange sweep, the LED glows green. It then blends from orange to red at the highest point in the flange sweep. This handy feature gives you visual feedback on the pedal's rate. With both controls at noon, the flange effect is quite slow, evoking the sci-fi image of my guitar being scanned by some sort of ominous robot eye in the sky. A full cycle of the flange wave takes about six seconds at this setting.

Turning the Feedback control up to about 3 o'clock increases the intensity of the wave and lends a more focused, resonant, and metallic tone, while adding a sinister touch to the sound. Setting the Rate knob at about 2 o'clock shortens the scan cycle to about once every second. With the Rate nearly maxed, the sweeps flutter with almost imperceptible speed that sound like convulsions of your consciousness as it's assimilated into the fabric of space and time. Yes, the Neo Mistress can sound *very* weird, as well as musical.

Filter Matrix Mode

The 10 o'clock position on the Rate knob is marked with a star. Moving counterclockwise from this position, the pedal enters its Filter Matrix Mode (a function that's activated with a switch on the Deluxe Electric Mistress). In this setting, you can effectively freeze the position of the flange at a fixed point on the wave, and then use the Feedback control to increase the resonance. Depending on where you set the Feedback, you can get chiming but metallic-tinged tones that sound almost synth-like. With my Fender Stratocaster and a high Feedback setting, the Neo Mistress transformed the brighter tones of the Fender single-coils into something like a steel drum. But careful tweaking of the Feedback knob will also bring out more natural-sounding frequencies that can make your tone more distinctive for breaks and solos.

The Verdict

For some players, one of the real drawbacks of the Electric Mistress and Deluxe Electric Mistress is their large footprint. The Neo Mistress addresses that concern in a major way by fitting much of the modulation horsepower of the original Mistress and Deluxe into a box the size of an MXR pedal. You sacrifice some of the tone coloration potential you get from a Deluxe's Color control, for instance, but with the onboard Filter Matrix Mode, the Neo is still a great tool for staking out some very distinctive—and unusual—sonic ground in a band mix.

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TECH 21
ROTO CHOIR

BY DIMITRI SIDERIADIS

Rating:

Buy If...
you're after a convincing and highly tweakable Leslie simulation.

Skip If...
a more antiseptic and completely noise-free rotary sound is essential to your sound.

Tech 21
Street $219
tech21nyc.com

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Evoking the vastness of the heavens in one moment and watery, pressurized pulsations the next is no small feat. However, this has been the task of the humble (and huge) Leslie rotating-speaker cabinet for decades. Guitarists' use and misuse of the Leslie and its swirling sounds is well chronicled. But simulating a rotary speaker convincingly with a stompbox remains one of the great challenges in the pedal-design world.

One of the more overlooked aspects of the Leslie's sound is that it has its own onboard tube amplifier. So when Andrew Barta of Tech 21 had a go at a rotary-speaker-in-a-stompbox, he felt it was natural to include his SansAmp tube-amp simulation—technology that has been an industry mainstay for years. And with such effective amp simulation onboard, the Roto Choir represents a unique departure from standard modulation fare. It is both an amp simulator *and* a rotary-speaker effect that excels at both.

Spin Doctor

The Roto Choir's tweaking options are very intuitive, given how much ground the pedal covers. Amplifier controls include Level, High and Low EQ knobs, and a Drive control. Bass rotor and horn rotation speed settings are adjustable via the Top Speed knob and Fast/Slow switch. The Biamped button spins (in the figurative sense) both the bass speaker rotor and treble horn when engaged, and bass speaker rotor alone when switched off. This latter setting greatly enhances the effect of the Position control, which simulates microphone proximity.

Round We Go

Plugging into a Fender Champ, I started my test of the Roto Choir with the Biamped button in the off position, getting rid of the horn component to get a more Fender Vibratone-like sound. I engaged the Slow setting and set the Position knob to 9 o'clock, which produced a lush, chorus-like sound peppered with a phasey, trebley color. Kicking the footswitch into Fast mode was like changing from chorus to an intense vibrato.

The pedal really comes into its own when switched into Biamped mode. With Position and Speed at noon, the sound coming out of my Les Paul's bridge humbucker bloomed and swirled throughout the room with impressive clarity and warmth. The sound was almost completely free of digital edginess, and I found myself delightfully lost in David Gilmour-like ambient swirl in both Slow and Fast modes. Just like a good old Leslie, the pedal is not exactly noise free, and the noise is more noticeable with the Drive control turned up. At no time, though, did the noise compete with or distract from the rich, musical sounds coming out of the amplifier.

Turning up the Position and Speed knobs put me into the Roto Choir's organ simulation range, which was probably my favorite tone. Those looking to get some of Jimmy Smith's funk and swing from a guitar should take note. Cutting back a bit on the Drive and Top Speed controls produced an even more subtle flavor that sounded quite like Charlie Hunter's organ-like sound on "Right Now Move."

The Verdict

If you're at all curious about the captivating sonorities and celestial potential of vintage rotating speakers, you should spend some time with the Tech 21 Roto Choir. On the Biamped setting especially, it's incredibly easy to conjure huge, smile-inducing sounds you never thought would come from a guitar. At times, the illusion is so strong it's hard to believe you're actually listening to a little metal box. The extra oomph and flavor you can coax from the pedal by toying with the amp section controls can help you tailor the effect even more precisely for your rig and performance situations. Good rotary simulators tend to be pretty expensive, and at $219, the Tech 21 isn't small change. But given the control and quality of the sounds within, it represents a value for anyone bent on exploring rotary speaker swirl.

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BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

Rating:

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Let's get something straight right off the bat: Ring modulators are not for the faint of heart. Some of the first musical applications of ring modulation were undertaken by mad-scientist synth pioneers Don Buchla and Robert Moog, who—needless to say—were quite comfortable with unorthodox musical expressions.

It's hard to not think about Moog or his musical legacy when you play the new Way Huge Ring Worm ring modulator. The twisted harmonic output is unmistakably synth like. It rarely does exactly what you expect, and at times it can feel like the musical equivalent of wrestling a greased pig. But if you're interested in more than the same old buttery-perfect blues-rock tone and traditional technique, or if you make music that walks on the wild side, the Ring Worm can expand your vocabulary drastically.

Radio Tardis

If you're not a synth-music devotee, ring modulator sounds may be most likely to remind you of the metallic voice heard in a thousand B-movie sci-fi computers—most famously Dr. Who's arch nemeses, the Daleks, who would scream "Exterminate!" in a ring-modulated rage before zapping some pitiful human. Ring modulators achieve their characteristic metalloid voice by multiplying a fundamental and modulated signal. The sum is a waveform made up of both perfect and irregular harmonic intervals, and the sonic result can be robotic, random, and evocative of everything from chimes to a deep-space nightmare.

The Ring Worm has five controls for steering the harmonic mayhem back to the playpen—*or* wildly out of control. Blend mixes the dry and modulated signals. Freq selects the frequency of the carrier wave. Width controls how deeply the LFO affects the frequency (at minimum, the LFO is basically off). And Rate governs the speed at which the LFO oscillates. A 5-position Mode knob selects waveforms, including sine and square waves, a random waveform generator, and step-down or descending waves. In theory, it's sort of like a tremolo. In practice, however, it's a different beast.

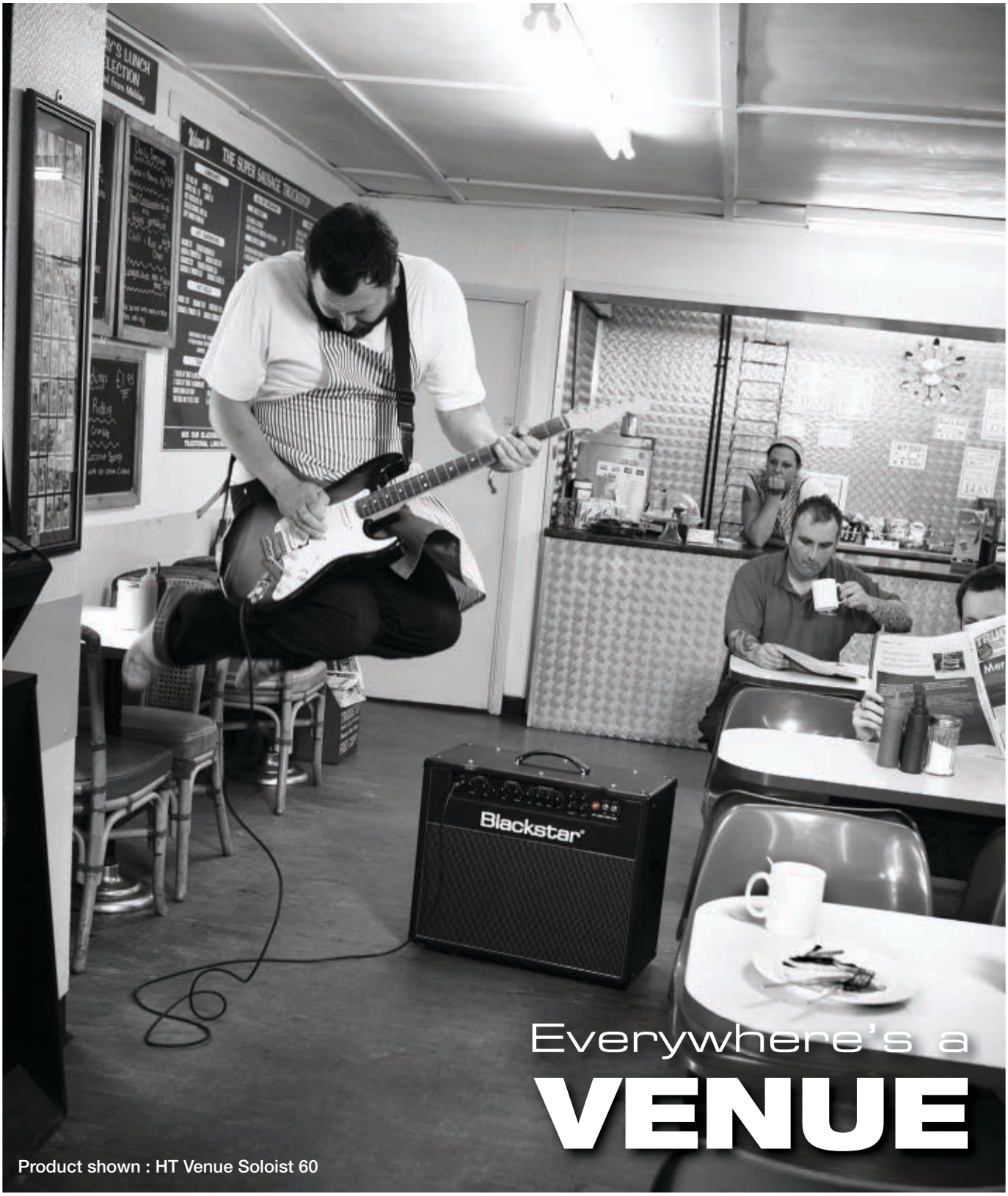
Space Invader

With its orange enclosure and purple graphics that suggest a mild state of psychosis, the Ring Worm doesn't really invite caution. So I began my experiments with little or no dry signal to hear the essence of the effect. With Rate, Width, and Freq at noon the soft, undulating sine wave has the springy, oscillating qualities of a flying-saucer engine. Crank Freq another quarter turn, and the high end (and the more menacing aspects of the impending saucer landing) are emphasized. The same settings on the step-down waveform sound like a drunk robot or a primitive, overworked computer, but when you twist Rate you'll nail the sound of a dot-engorged Pac Man in pursuit of blinking ghosts. If you're more likely to feed your quarters to the Galaga machine at the arcade, the descending wave, a Freq setting that favors the high end, and a Rate set to three-quarters full will have you seeing space bugs dive-bombing for the kill.

Getting sounds for more traditional musical contexts is really just a matter of using the Blend knob. Settings that use just a touch of effected signal can sound full and synthy, especially with more subtle Rate and Freq settings. Such settings also sound fantastic with a fat and bassy fuzz out front. And even the oddest modulations can create very cool, double-take-inspiring textures behind an ordinary Tony Iommi-style solo.

The Verdict

Patience is of the essence when you use the Ring Worm. If you don't take the time to explore how the pedal relates to other effects, tone settings, and dry-to-wet blends are likely to let this thing collect dust. But even in fairly run-of-the-mill heavy rock and indie-pop settings, the Ring Worm can add color that'll change the landscape of an entire tune.



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T-REX TONEBUG SENSEWAH

BY LYLE ZAEHRINGER

Rating:

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Skip If...

you need the rocking control of a standard wah pedal.

T- Rex Effects

Street $149

t-rex-effects.com

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Auto-wahs can inspire confusion among the uninitiated: Hey, where's the rocker pedal? Why would I relinquish control of my wah to some guitar automaton?

In the most basic lay terms, an auto-wah is an envelope filter that detects variation in your attack and initiates upward frequency sweep to produce the wah effect automatically. The louder your input, the higher the position of the frequency sweep—and vice versa. The end result, however, is still recognizable as a wah effect.

T-Rex's new auto-wah, the Sensewah, is the newest additon to the company's compact Tonebug line. Each Tonebug unit comes in a retro-hued metal-and-chrome package, and the crimson Sensewah looks like something that might have been snatched from the dashboard of a '50s Chevy.

Sensation

The controls on the Sensewah are very simple—two knobs (Sense and Range), a single toggle switch that moves between Wah Wah and Yoy Yoy settings, and an on/off footswitch. The unit is light and sturdy, and the quality that typifies the T-Rex line is evident. The straightforward design also makes it simple and intuitive to access a wide array of tones.

With the Sensewah between my Fender Stratocaster and a '69 Fender Super Bassman, I set the Sense and Range controls at noon, and the toggle to Wah Wah, which gave me a cool, funky, and steady auto-wah sound right off the bat. Because of the Strat's lower pickup output, I had to play a bit harder to get a more drastic response from the pedal. But by turning up the Sense knob—which is essentially a sensitivity knob that adjusts responsiveness to your picking—I was able to play with a more natural touch and still fully engage the device's wah effect.

The Range knob controls the width or narrowness of the envelope and how far the wah effect will sweep. At wide-open settings, the wah will run through the pedal's full sweep range. At lower settings, your sound will be closer to the darker pedal-up tone you'd get from a standard wah pedal. It was also very easy to dial in my instrument's output to interact optimally with the Sensewah's adjustable envelope, and dropping the Strat's volume not only produces a cool cleaner tone, but a subtler response from the unit.

Yoy!

With the toggle set to Yoy Yoy mode, the Sensewah takes on a significantly different personality through the use of formant-style filters, which have more than just the single EQ curve of a regular wah effect. In the case of the Yoy Yoy setting, there is a higher, more nasal, and resonant curve that follows the lower curve. The result is very vocal in the manner of a talk box, and you can easily generate bizarre, but musically pleasing sounds. Even at its most high-mid focused settings, the pedal remains throaty, full, and expressive. It's important to remember that because of the high resonance in this mode, you'll want to make sure to tame extra brightness elsewhere in your signal to keep the pedal from getting too harsh—especially with single-coils and a bright amp.

The Verdict

The Sensewah is about as straightforward as auto-wahs come, and it's the kind of pedal that can really change the texture of songs you're playing without taking up a ton of pedalboard room. And if you like the sound of wahs and talk boxes, but don't like the extent to which you have to manually manipulate those effects, the Sensewah is a sensible solution indeed.

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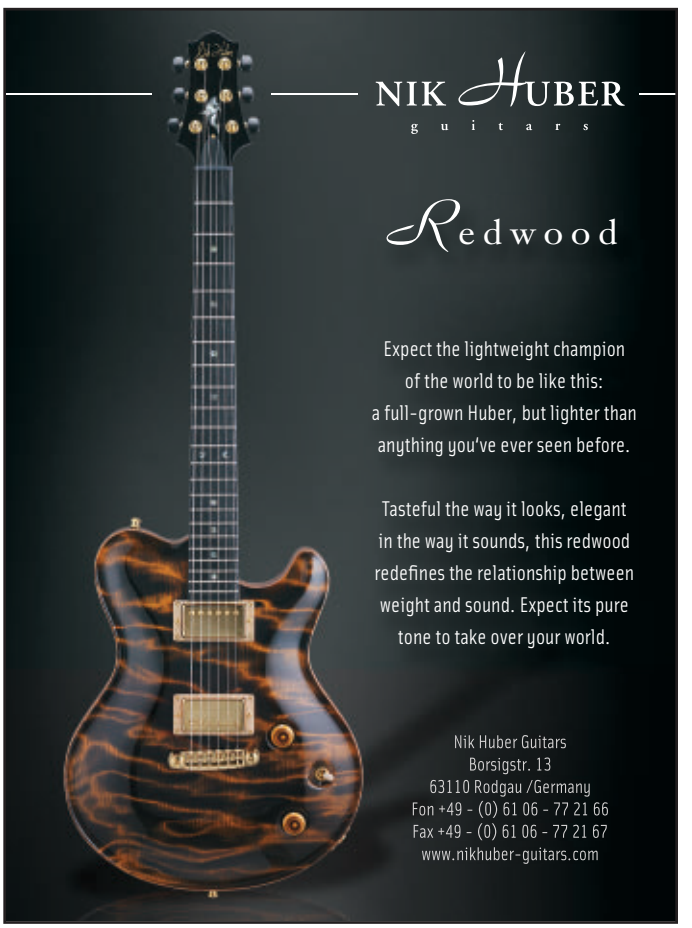
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MODTONE EFFECTS
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BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

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Reverb is one of the simplest and most natural effects of all. But reverb pedals have evolved a lot over the last decade—often into monsters with a million controls and presets. One incidental payoff of this investigation into reverb's outer limits is that it's possible to find a single, affordable pedal that can cover everything from call-from-the-mountaintop 'verb to subtle room ambience. ModTone's Coliseum Reverb manages both of those feats while sounding particularly sweet and authentic across a wide array of reverb types.

Pillars of Control

The Coliseum, which honors its namesake with cool Roman column graphics, is housed in a small MXR-style brushed aluminum chassis that will fit even the most real estate-challenged pedalboard. Although there are plenty of reverb pedals out there with features like stereo ins and outs, and 10 different parameter controls, the Coliseum offers simplicity. There are just two knobs—Level and Tone—plus a mini toggle switch that selects Room, Spring, or Grand Hall. ModTone's designers seem aware that most players are conditioned to set a reverb level on their amp and leave it there, rather than tweak it on the fly. So it's impressive to see how much range the Coliseum delivers with a streamlined and easy-to-navigate control set.

Face Off

With an Ernie Ball/Music Man Axis Sport in hand, I tried out the Coliseum with a variety of Fender amps. To start, I paired the Coliseum up with a silverface Vibro Champ, a silverface Princeton Reverb, and a '63 Vibroverb reissue. With the Coliseum set to Spring, Level around 1 o'clock, and Tone around 10 o'clock, my vintage Vibro Champ twitched with new life and sounded a lot like the tiny Fender I've always wanted. Comparing the Coliseum against my Princeton Reverb and Vibroverb reissue offered other insights. The Coliseum's Spring and Hall settings got me in the same ballpark as the reverb-equipped Fenders, but there were times when the Coliseum's reverb sounded richer than the Princeton's onboard reverb. It may just be a matter of preference in this case, but for my money, that's a mighty impressive feat on the Coliseum's part—and fellow musicians in the room were inclined to agree.

The Grand Hall setting is a lot of fun, and this is where players used to the limitations of onboard amp reverb can spread their wings. With the Level around 12 o'clock, I got a subtle, almost slapback delay effect that fits well into traditional rock 'n' roll and classic rock settings. But when maxed, I was treated to an extremely lush cloud of reverb with a long decay time that sounded great with Eric Johnson-style open-voiced triads and intricate, volume-swelled chords. Usually when I play those types of atmospheric figures, I like to add delay for ambience, but the Coliseum was so full sounding on its own that delay was almost redundant.

With the Coliseum's Tone rolled off, I got an ultra-warm sound, and when I turned the Tone way up, it almost sounded like a church organ. This latter sound is fantastic for chords and arpeggios in slower, quieter frameworks. In both extremes, the Coliseum was extremely musical and never sounded artificial. The Grand Hall setting was even useful with single-note lines that would typically sound messy with a reverb this cavernous.

The Verdict

The Coliseum is an excellent reverb pedal that could be the perfect complement to a reverb-less vintage amp or take the place of a lackluster amp reverb. Its small size and relative affordability make it doubly appealing. And given its range of reverb effects, it has to rank among the best bang-for-the-buck reverbs available today.

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STRYMON TIMELINE

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

PREMIERGuitar PREMIER GEAR

Rating:

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Skip If...
simply using your existing delay unit's tap-tempo functionality makes your brain hurt.

Strymon
Street $449
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At this point, most guitarists familiar with Strymon are accustomed to having the company knock their socks off. In the last couple of years, this Southern California-based group of hardcore pedal geeks has garnered raves in these pages for their Blue Sky Reverberator (July 2010) and El Capistan tape-delay emulator (November 2010). The company's latest weapon for sonic tweaking, the TimeLine delay, is every bit as impressive. And if you're a studio hound—home, pro, or otherwise—the TimeLine is worth your undivided attention.

Pure Function

Strymon says the TimeLine is inspired by studio-grade outboard delays, and the pedal's super-functional and get-down-to-business control layout is a reflection of the muse. The gunmetal gray box may look busy compared to other stompbox delays, but given the enormous wealth of functions within, it's actually quite streamlined. The seven knobs, arrayed asymmetrically on the right side of the pedal, modify the delayed signal in both basic ways (time, repeats, mix) and more radical ones (grit, filter, and modulation rate and depth.) An eighth knob accesses additional parameters for each effect. Twelve delay types can be selected with the Type knob on the left, which can also be pushed to save presets. The three footswitches serve dual functions, enabling you to activate two preset banks, control the looper's play and record functions, and tap out tempos.

Worlds of Echo

There's no way to cover everything the TimeLine can do in a single review, but while it's a pedal of formidable power, its intuitive enough that you can jump right in and conjure about a trillion cool sounds immediately. The 12 delay "machines," as Strymon calls them, include the dTape tape-echo simulation that's at the core of the El Capistan pedal, the company's dBucket analog-delay emulation, and a digital delay—all of which will delight discerning traditional tonehounds. But the less-conventional delays are where the real fun starts. Dual delay adds a second set of repeats that lend a spacious, reverb-like ambience that fans of Radiohead's Ed O'Brien and Jonny Greenwood will adore. The Ice setting is similarly cosmic, though it does the cool trick of slicing and dicing the delayed signal and playing them back as though they were shards of a broken mirror. And with a capo on the 7th fret of my Danelectro Hodad 12-string, the simplest folk arpeggios became a celestial choir.

The Filter delays enable the addition of a synchronized low-filter oscillator to the delayed signal, as well as resonance adjustment that lends a synth-like tweak and a little mid-'70s Jerry Garcia vowel tone to the repeats. The Swell setting gives your repeats an almost volume-pedal like bloom. Trem lends a cool pulsating warble, while Reverse, when used on bendy, Eastern-flavored lines with a longer delay time and fewer repeats, is a vehicle for mind-bending psychedelic leads.

The dTape and dBucket machines have their own unique set of functions that are assigned to the Filter, Grit, Depth, and Speed controls. For instance, in dTape mode, the Filter control becomes a Tape Age emulation, while the Speed control emulates Tape Crinkle at various levels of decrepitude. Other delays use the Filter, Grit, and Depth, and Speed knobs in a more straightforward manner. But they are highly editable in other ways through use of the Value knob, which can be depressed to give you access to another level of performance-modifying options. The Ice mode, for instance, has a an Interval control that enables to you to tailor the pitch intervals of repeats from one octave down to two octaves up, with everything from major thirds and minor sevenths in between. I used this function to craft very song-specific harmonies. All such settings can be stored as presets, as well.

The Verdict

While the TimeLine is an amazing tool in live contexts, many players will find it incredibly expressive in the studio, too. In addition to the deep functionality of the unit at the most immediately accessible levels, each delay machine can seem almost infinitely tweakable to suit a musical situation. All this processing power isn't cheap, but given that this Strymon may lead you to abandon every delay in your collection except perhaps your bar-gig unit, it could well be worth every cent over the long haul.

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BY JORDAN WAGNER

Rating:

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One of the most useful tools in a seasoned-player's arsenal is a good, simple, delay unit. These days, a lot of delay pedals offer a smorgasbord of features, with dazzling arrays of controls and knobs to shape and sculpt the delayed tone, and even loop it. You can almost forget how many cool tones can be coaxed from a conventional, 3-knob delay as the new Mellow-D by Studio Blue's Levana Audio demonstrates handily.

More Than Meets the Eye

Anyone used to old, 3-knob analog-delay units like the Boss DM-2 and Ibanez AD-9 can use the Mellow-D blindfolded. There are familiar controls for Time, Feedback, and Level (which acts as a volume control for the wet signal). The circuit is digital, but it's designed to emulate the warmth of older, tape delays. And the digital circuit enables the Levana pedal to significantly increase the available delay time, to a maximum of 1000 ms.

Familiar as it looks on the surface, the Levana has one very unique trick up its powder-blue sleeve. There's a 3-way switch on the top of the unit that brings in two degrees of leftover digital distortion and applies it to the delayed signal. In the top position, the repeats come back with a higher frequency range. And in the bottom position, they kick back with a lower set of frequencies and a slight drop in fidelity that can help you radicalize your repeats.

Nothing Yellow About This Mellow

The pristine sounds of a Fender 60th Anniversary Telecaster and a Fender '65 Twin Reverb combo were a perfect canvas for the Mellow-D to show off its warm, granulated, vintage-styled tones. The short delay-times are delightfully sputtery and perfect for bathtub-delayed, single-note country riffing. In this context, the pedal is super-responsive to pick attack, and the delay repeats distorted ever so slightly as I started in with a harder, more-defined pick attack.

Longer delay times are a treat as well, and reveal how well the Mellow-D really cops the tone of a well-worn, vintage tape delay. The dirtiness and lower fidelity of the repeats was much more noticeable when I had the Time control set above 10 o'clock—each repeat had a great, decaying quality that, at times, made me wish I could sustain each repeat. They sound that cool.

Some of the coolest tones within the Mellow-D exist thanks to the 3-way switch on the top of the unit. As I flicked the switch to the up position, a really abrasive white-noise rang from the Twin's speakers. After dropping the Feedback control to just slightly a hair above the off position, I was able to hear the effect's extremely eerie, digitally distorted repeats ringing in the upper registers of the highs. Bringing the Feedback control up made the effect more intense, and when I brought it up to around 9 o'clock, the signal bled into a glorious, self-oscillating feedback that stopped immediately when I started playing again—perfect for soundscape work, à la Robert Fripp and Brian Eno.

The Verdict

Levana managed to build a really great-sounding tape delay emulator, but the real treat is the pedal's digital repeat distortion switch. I'm hard-pressed to think of any effect I've come across that sounds and reacts quite like it, which is a definite plus in terms of adding a new spin on an old idea. And if you're often left wondering how to indulge your inner traditionalist and experimentalist with the same pedal, the Levana Mellow-D may be the key.

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PROVIDENCE
CHRONO DELAY DLY-4

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Rating:

Buy If...
you crave vintage sounds but need modern features.

Skip If...
you don't mind imprecise delay times.

Providence
Street $449
providence-ltd.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

While its products are well regarded by pro players like Carl Verheyen and Jon Herrington, Japan-based Providence is still relatively unknown in the States. I first heard about the company through Matt Schofield, who touted its SOV-2 as the best overdrive he'd ever come across.

Since 2009, however, Providence has been distributed by Godlyke—a partnership that's likely to elevate the brand's visibility significantly. Providence is also bound to benefit from superb pedals like the Chrono Delay DLY-4, which replaces their cult-classic DLY-83, but also adds many significant upgrades that enable you tailor a very vintage analog delay sound with superb modern control and fine-tuning capabilities.

Feature Packed

The DLY-4 crams a lot of control into a relatively small pedal. In addition to the usual controls—Mix, Feedback, and Time (from 1 to 2700 ms)—there are knobs for Echo Hardness, which lets you adjust the delayed signal's mids and highs, and Beat Split, which lets you choose the rhythmic subdivision of the repeats. There's an LED readout in the middle of the pedal that displays the delay time, and just under the lights are two toggle switches that let you choose between having the delay time represented as beats-per-minute or milliseconds and selecting either A/B or Tap tempo modes. At the bottom of the pedal are two footswitches—On/Off and A/B or Tap. A slim, power-strip-friendly 12-volt DC wall wart is included.

Robust Repeats

I tested the DLY-4 using a Gibson ES-339 and a Mesa/Boogie Tremoverb—running the delay both in front of the amp and through its effects loop. In either setting the pedal is quiet and rich sounding.

Sustained bends with long delay and tripped-out, Edge-style rhythmic shenanigans, were both lush and extremely warm and clear. A twist of the Echo Hardness knob, sharpened the repeats making them more defined and almost percussive. It's a little like being able to move between the qualities of a tape delay setting to a digital sound with the turn of a single knob.

The beats-per-minute time display option is a major convenience. Right off the bat, I was able to sync delays in time without having to convert ms to bpms, pull out a timing chart, or tap in a tempo in hope that it registered correctly. Once I set a tempo, the Beat Split knob made it a breeze to get the exact rhythmic subdivisions I wanted from the repeats. For example, if you want both quarter-note and eighth-note repeats at 120 bpm, you could leave the Beat Split set for quarter-notes and save delay times of 120 and 240 bpm, which will sound like eighth-notes at 120 bpm. Flicking two knobs is much easier than calculating, say, how many ms are needed to generate 16ths at 100 bpm. And the more precise subdivisions can be quite effective when used in conjunction with the harder and more percussive Echo hardness settings.

The A/B preset memory allows you to store and recall two different delay time settings—great for moving from slapback to a long delay during a single song, for instance. Parameters like Beat Split or Feedback cannot be stored so you'll have to have some familiarity with how to best set them for a given delay time to retain the super-precise subdivision settings that are such a strong suit of the Chrono Delay.

The Verdict

For most players, analog delays are the standard for sonic quality—even if it means trading precision for ballpark delay time settings. The DLY-4 pulls off the considerable warmth of the classics, but also allows precise and easy control of delay times. And although it carries a hefty street price of $449, and lacks stereo output or fancy features like modulation, if optimum delay time control and analog sounds are what you need in a pedal, the Providence Chrono is hard to top.

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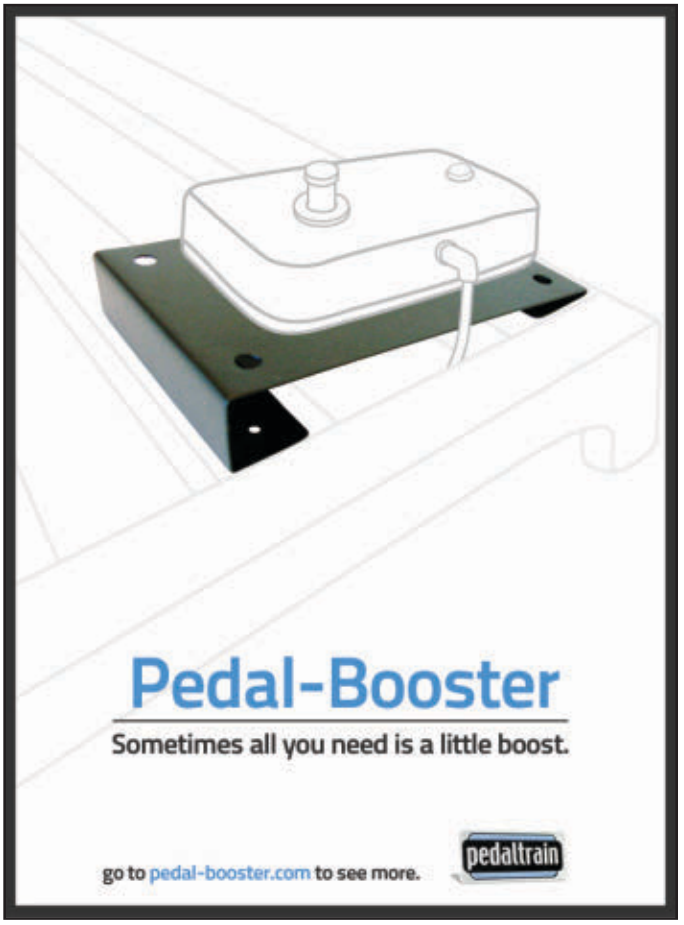
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Two-Rock Amps
VanAmps Effects
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SOLIDGOLDFX
SURF RIDER

BY STEVE OUIMETTE

Who doesn't love reverb? Whether it's from an old Fender Deluxe Reverb or a super-tweakable digital unit, most of us would agree that being enveloped in the lushness of a verbed-out note is a thing of beauty. But for all the shapes that reverb takes, there's something about a spring reverb that's still special. Maybe it's the way those vibrating springs colored everything from surf to country to psychedelia in the first two decades of rock 'n' roll, but the appeal is undeniable.

Though the Surf Rider isn't a true spring reverb, the device recreates the tone and response of a spring unit with remarkable accuracy. All this in a box that fits on your pedalboard and you don't have to handle with kid gloves.

Beach Motel

With its black and turquoise color scheme, script lettering and wave graphics, the Surf Rider looks like a matchbook from a funky old coastal motel. The control set, however, reflects a modern sensibility toward tailoring your reverb sound. The Res (resonance) control tailors the virtual size of the reverb tank from long to short, Depth sets the intensity of the reverb, Level is a blend control that goes from dry to soaking wet, and Tone lets you dial in how dark or bright the reverb sounds.

Ride the Wild...

I played the Surf Rider with a variety of amplifiers, including a Rivera-era Fender Concert, a Mojave Dirty Boy, and even Overloud's TH-2 amp modeling software in Pro Tools. Operating the unit is straightforward, easy, and lends itself to a lot of fun exploration. To get a haunting, almost volume swell-like wash, I set the Level to 2 o'clock and pulled the Tone down to about 10 o'clock to reduce the brightness. This yielded a gorgeous lushness that was both beautiful and eerie. There was not a hint of harshness in the tone, and notes simply rang out and then sank gracefully back into the abyss.

Rating:

Buy If...

the only thing that stands between you and vintage spring reverb tone is the hassle of tubes and maintenance.

Skip If...

more contemporary and programmable digital reverb is essential to your sound.

SolidGoldFX

Street $225

solidgoldfx.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

To get that killer Dick Dale sound (which he gets by running through a '60s tube-driven Fender Reverb unit), I cranked up the Tone and turned the Res to the lowest setting to get the longest tank simulation. With the Level up higher and the Depth fairly high, you could hear those chaotic and wild elements that make this tone so cool—a sound at which the Surf Rider excels.

But the Surf Rider doesn't only excel at the wild and crazy. It does a fine job of adding a little extra touch of depth and size to notes without getting in the way. And even with the Level way down, the additional texture made a beautiful and tasteful addition to any clean guitar tone I threw at it.

The Verdict

SolidGoldFX has done a great job of capturing the sound and spirit of a vintage spring-reverb unit without the size and maintenance issues that go with the territory. Perhaps the only thing missing from the Surf Rider is being able to kick it and get the springs to bark like on a vintage amp, and—depending on your musical values—that might not be such a bad thing. For me, the Surf Rider's stability and solidity is a winning combination. Given how authentic this pedal sounds—and that it's priced at a fraction of a vintage or reissue standalone Fender unit—it's a pretty good deal too.

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LOTUS YELLOW

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Rating:

Buy If...

you want a simple, but sweet-sounding delay made with top-shelf components.

Skip If...

you need features that are commonly found in digital delays, such as long delay times, looping, and tap-tempo capability.

Lotus Pedal Designs

Street $249

lotuspedaldesigns.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Sean Erspamer founded Lotus Pedal Designs in 2009, when—like so many pedal makers—he couldn't find stompboxes that sounded just the way he wanted. Since then, he has designed a line of eight no-frills pedals including the recently released Yellow delay featured in this review.

Handbuilt in Bob Dylan's hometown of Duluth, Minnesota, Lotus pedals seem to reflect that region's hardy spirit—or perhaps the subdued hues of a Minnesota winter. You won't see Lotus pedals covered in flashy paint or sporting cryptic names for knob functions, yet within the Yellow's unfinished enclosure, you'll find such top-quality components as Neutrik jacks, Alpha pots, Teflon-coated wiring, and all-analog circuitry.

Straight to Business

Depending on your mood, the Yellow can exude understated elegance or seem utilitarian to the point of frustration. None of the knobs are labeled, and apart from the company logo, there's no sign of print or graphics. The only visually distinguishing feature on any of Erspamer's creations is the color of the knobs and the LED, and each pedal is named accordingly. There are three—you guessed it—yellow pointer knobs on the Yellow that control (from left to right) Time, Blend, and Repeat. At times, it was slightly aggravating to try to remember which knob did what, so I ended up just making a cheat sheet and leaving it under the pedal. (I pulled out a few other delay pedals to see if there's a universal arrangement of delay pedal knobs I had forgotten about. There isn't.)

A single footswitch rounds out the pedal's simple control layout with the input and output jacks located on the left and right sides of the pedal, respectively. The Yellow runs on one 9V battery. However, given that delay units tend to eat batteries and you have to remove the back panel to change out the cell, you'll probably opt to power the Yellow with an adaptor.

Elegant Echoes

Using a Parker Fly Deluxe, I ran the Yellow into the effects loop of a Mesa/Boogie Lone Star Special head driving a Marshall 1x12 cabinet, and also straight into an Ampeg SJ-12R Super Jet with an Ibanez Tube Screamer before the delay. In both setups the delay was nothing short of gorgeous. Repeats were ultra warm with a perceptible tape-like treble roll-off and natural decay. Although the repeats tend toward slightly dark and soft sounding, they never muddied my tone.

The Yellow sounded especially nice through the Lone Star's loop when I had the amp set for a smooth lead sound, and the Yellow set with Time at 2 o'clock, Blend at 1 o'clock, and Repeat at 3 o'clock. Long sustained bends sounded thicker and fuller, and when I played faster flurries of notes, the Yellow's mellow repeats did not invade my sonic space the way a more defined digital repeat might. Compared to my vintage Ibanez AD-9, one of the benchmarks of analog echo, the Yellow sounded more musical and natural.

The Verdict

There aren't any fancy features on the Yellow, and you don't get an insane amount of delay time (the Yellow's range is from 10 ms to 580 ms). But the high-quality craftsmanship and parts on this barebones Lotus box combine to produce beautiful natural tones. If you're out to avoid digital sterility and value a simpler approach to delay, this very unobtrusive pedal might be all you ever need.

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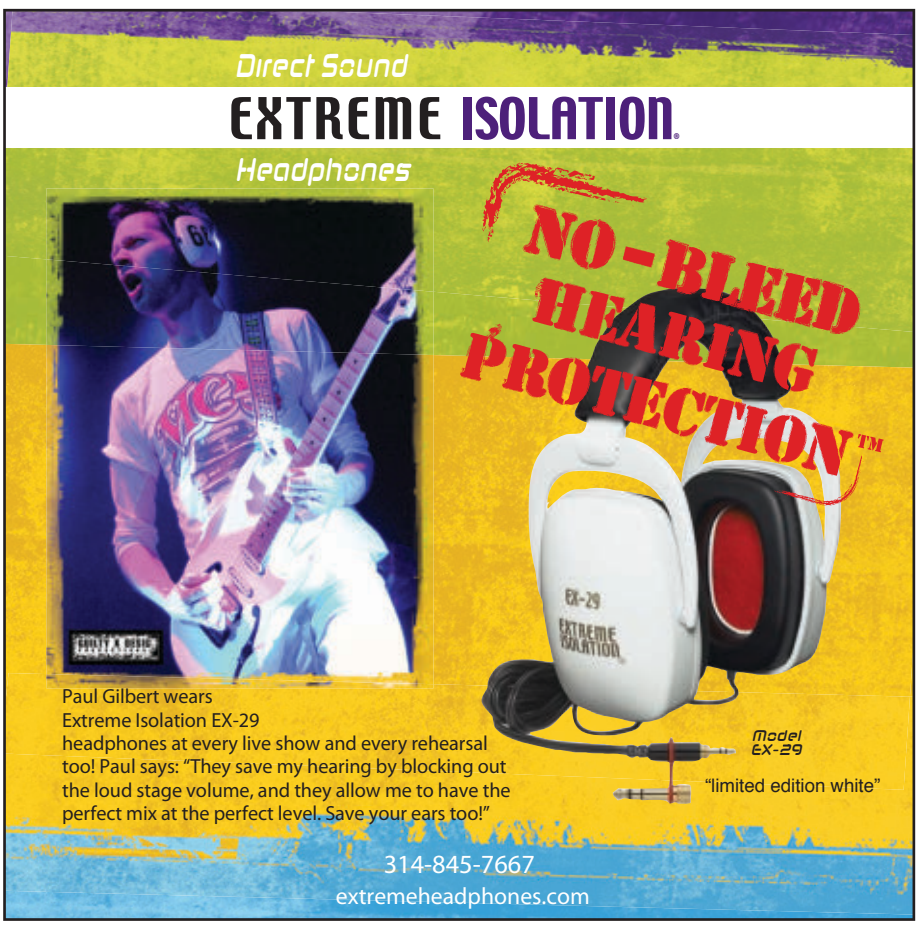
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SUBDECAY OCTASYNTH

BY LYLE ZAEHRINGER

Rating:

Buy If...

you're looking to add classic synth sounds to your tunes without hiring a keyboard player.

Skip If...

there's a reason why you don't already have a keyboard player.

SubDecay

Street $179

subdecay.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

When they first hit the airwaves, the monophonic analog synths of the '60s and '70s bewildered listeners with their impossible, otherworldly timbres. They changed modern music in a major way too. The Buchla 200, Minimoog, and Arp 2600, among others, became staples of pop melodies, commercials, and film soundscapes, and have remained fixtures in electronic and experimental genres and forward-thinking guitar music alike.

Like so many analog artifacts that don't quite get their due in their time, monophonic analog synths are now embraced by players who have found that nothing sounds quite as fat and rich. And Oregon-based SubDecay's Octasynth does a fantastic job of delivering classic analog sounds and modern, noisy, glitchy tones, in a pedal that's authentically synth-like *and* responsive to guitarists and the dynamic strengths of the guitar itself.

Controlled Chaos

Powered by 9V battery or standard DC adapter, the Octasynth is a handbuilt, sturdy—and with its circa-'76 video game graphics—supremely vibey pedal. It is also true-bypass with 100 percent analog circuitry. But of greatest importance to most guitarists, who may be coming from a place of relative synth naïveté, it's very simple to operate.

In some ways, you can think of the Octasynth as an octave pedal with an analog-synth brain. It converts your monophonic (single note) signal into three separate square waves—the root, one octave down, and two octaves down. Using its Blend control, the Octasynth lets you to build a sound with any combination of those voices. With the Blend at noon, all three synth waves are present and this results in a rich and slightly chorusy sound.

One of the most impressive features of the Octasynth is its dynamic filter, which works interactively with your pick attack, not unlike an auto wah. Palm-muted notes will produce short, stabbing synth-bass pops, while articulated, sustaining notes will produce brassy, lingering tones. As the strength of the input signal (your pick attack) is reduced, the filter cutoff sweeps lower into thunderous sub-octave zones. The Resonance knob, like any filter resonance control, determines the intensity of the frequencies near the filter cutoff. At minimum settings, the filter is nearly imperceptible. At maximum settings, the filter sweep is intense and approaches self-oscillation, which gives you a lot of range to shape the synth's voice.

Close Encounters

Like most octave and synth-styled pedals, single notes and neck pickups are essential to getting the best tone, and I found that using my Gibson SG's neck pickup with the tone control rolled back produced a much more controlled response from the unit. With my vintage Fender Super Bassman dialed in for a throaty clean tone, I engaged the Octasynth with all controls at noon and was struck by how much my guitar rig sounded like a Roland Juno-6, a digitally controlled analog synth used extensively in '80s synth pop and video games.

I was also amazed by how responsive the pedal is to playing dynamics. Even the most controlled, robotic, palm-muted staccato notes on my guitar had slight variations in filter response. And I was able to jam synth lines with the advantage of extremely expressive touch sensitivity not possible with any keyboard I've ever played, which is *very* cool and might, by itself, justify buying this pedal.

Tweaking the filter controls gave me access to a wide variety of tones including driving, sustained, buzzing lead lines and deep, pumping bass sequences—and everything in between. Chords are a garbled mess of glitchy goodness. But this is really a pedal for spicing up leads, guitar melodies, and second parts based on single-note patterns. That's hardly a limitation, however. Given the few controls, the versatility is impressive.

The Verdict

Synthesizers, whether vintage or modern, tend to be pretty complex. But SubDecay's Octasynth takes the basic concepts and sounds of those classic mind-bending machines and loads them into a simple-to-use and straightforward unit. It'll give you truly potent and expressive old-school sounds that can spice up a run-of-the-mill funk or space rock jam.

Bruisingly beautiful.

The new Naked amp challenges you to plug in, crank up and bare your creative soul. Designed by legendary amp guru Dave Friedman, it offers two channels – one clean, one dirty – of unabashed aggression, perfect for dropped tunings. With its EL34-fueled British snarl and modern rock edge, the Naked earned a Premier Gear award from Premier Guitar. Find out why the critics are raving. Hear it at Tone Merchants in North Hollywood and Make'n Music in Chicago, the newest dealer to showcase Rack Systems custom amps. Or check it out online at tonemerchants.com and brace yourself for a massive, satisfying dose of sensory overload.

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Premier Guitar, September 2010

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JULIET COLLECTIVE CIRCADIA

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

Even in today's golden age of boutique stompboxes, not many pedal builders embody the boundlessly imaginative, renegade spirit of pioneers like Electro-Harmonix, Morley, and Mu-Tron quite like Mississippi's Juliet Collective. As a peek at any of the Collective's short YouTube videos illustrates, they like to do things their own way—traditionalists be damned. Juliet Collective's irreverence is more than just posturing, though: The young company, which is headed up by a partnership that includes designer Robbie Spears, builds pedals that break away from established templates and rewards adventurous approaches to the guitar. The Circadia polyrhythmic auto wah is the perfect embodiment of the Juliet Collective's philosophy. Not every player will find a need for one, but those who do are likely to cover interesting new ground.

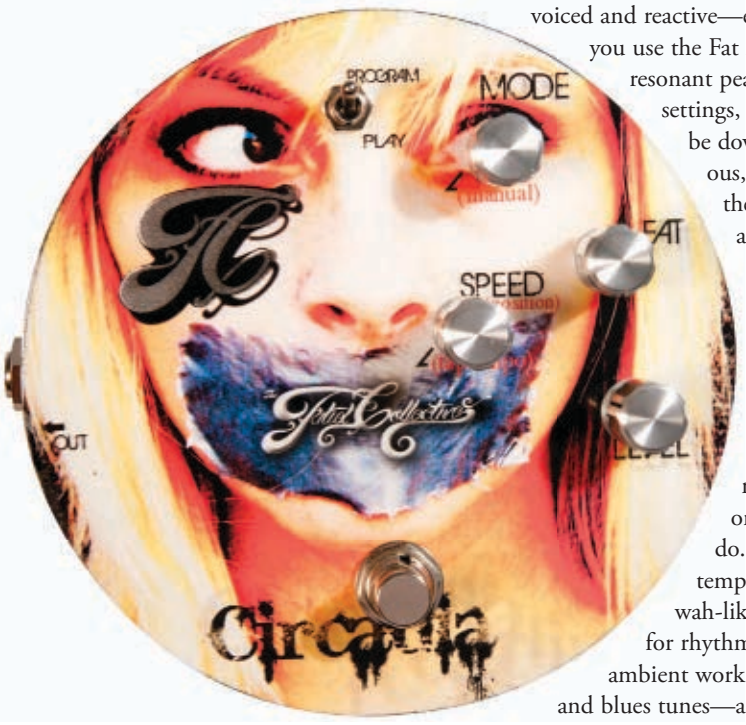
In Search Of...

The Circadia is nothing if not an eyeful. The graphics, which are actually screened onto a thin piece of plastic and applied to the round metal chassis, aren't likely to be mistaken for anything else on your pedalboard. The control set is a little unconventional, too, and it takes a few minutes of playing with the thing before you really understand how they work together.

The Mode function enables you to scroll through the Circadia's preset polyrhythms, which play behind your picking, and the presets range from cool, Bolero-style 3/4 rhythms to drum-and-bass-type syncopations and four-on-the-floor beats. Rhythms are visually represented through the glowing, multicolored JC logo on the left of the pedal, which looks a lot like a lighted disco floor.

The tempo of any preset can be altered with the Speed knob, which can take your preset rhythm to the stratosphere or slow things to a glacial crawl. Twisting it completely counterclockwise selects tap-tempo mode, which is activated by turning the pedal off and then on again.

The Fat knob makes wah swells rounder and more vowel-like as you turn it clockwise. The Level control is both aggressively voiced and reactive—especially when you use the Fat knob to create resonant peaks. At high Level settings, the peaks can be downright dangerous, but set just right they can be a funky accent for solos.



...The Lost Wah

Thanks to the polyrhythm presets, the Circadia does things that no ordinary wah or auto-wah can do. Slow, odd-meter tempos create cool, wah-like swells ideal for rhythmically oriented ambient work or slower soul and blues tunes—and they can also inspire cool counterpoints to a vocal melody, or even a whole drum part.

For the latter reason, control freaks may have a hard time with the Circadia. It often does seem to have a mind of its own. And it may, at times, ask you to play to what *it's* doing instead of the other way around. But jamming away in my rehearsal space with a drummer, a syncopated rhythm played off a simple funk rhythm became a whole new groove, mood, and song. In this way, the Circadia has the potential to be one of those magic bullets when you're in a compositional rut. It may not have the answer you were looking for, but it can lead you down paths you may not have known to exist.

Tweaking the Fat knob gives you a Funkadelic-/Garcia-esque envelope filter effect, regardless of the tempo, and the resonant peaks can punctuate percussive picking in an intriguing way.

The Verdict

The Juliet Collective Circadia will take you on an adventure every time you plug it in. However, it demands that you release a lot of preconceptions about how a pedal should work—and at times you almost have to regard it as an accompanist or an additional member of your band who leads the way. The controls aren't entirely intuitive, either, but this isn't really a pedal for a player who wants things neat and easy, anyway. Sign up at your own risk, but get ready for a wild ride.

Rating:

Buy If...

you're fearlessly adventurous and intrigued by the thought of an auto-wah that sometimes seems to have a mind of its own.

Skip If...

4/4 time is about as tricky as you like to get.

The Juliet Collective

Street $239

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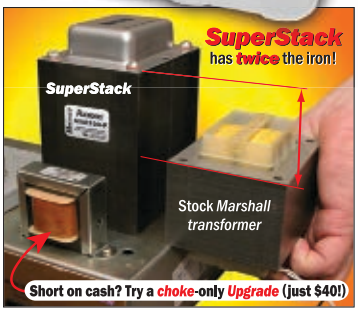

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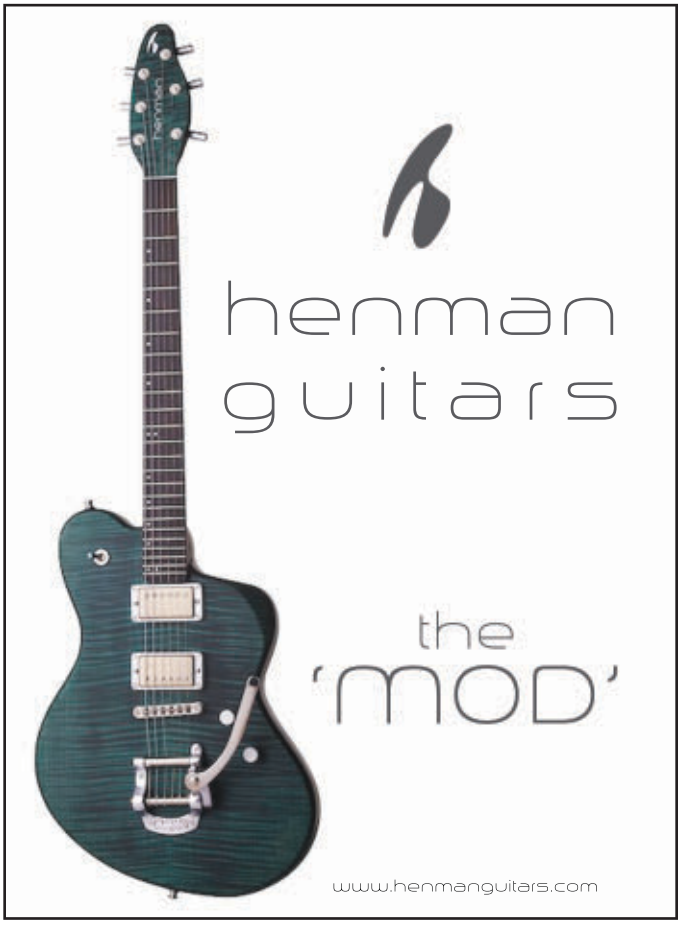

PIGTRONIX TREMVELOPE

BY LYLE ZAEHRINGER

Tremolo is one of the oldest electronic guitar effects—a common feature on combo amps as early as the 1940s. In its most basic form, tremolo is simply amplitude modulation, like turning a volume knob up and down.

It's nothing, if not a simple effect. And for the most part, it's simple to please tremolo fans too. A nice vintage Fender or Gibson amp-based circuit or a pedal that can move from choppier square waves to softer sine or sawtooth forms will usually do the trick. But the analog, optical Pigtronix Tremvelope invites tremolo fans to look deeper into what the effect can deliver. By effectively combining a trem circuit with an envelope follower, Pigtronix has produced one of the most creative and dynamically responsive tremolos we've heard.

Here Piggy, Piggy

You can typically count on a Pigtronix stompbox to give you a lot of ways to tweak your sound, and the Tremvelope is no exception to the rule. With six 1/4" jacks, four mini switches, three knobs, three LEDs, and two footswitches, it has the potential to leave players used to bare-bones tremolo effects scratching their heads. Even the Speed and Depth controls are more versatile than those on an old amplifier, because you can control their effect on the tone with either playing dynamics or a TRS expression pedal. The sonic payoff for all the control options can be immense.

Wild as a Boar

Two mini switches (Depth and Speed) help make this expanded interactivity possible. Each switch has three positions: Plus, Minus, and Off. These switches modify the way in which the Envelope functions. Flip the Speed switch to Plus, and the tremolo will speed up the harder you play. Switch it to Minus and the opposite happens. This effect has a particularly profound emotive quality where quiet, tender melodies can be reinforced by slower undulations, but can be made more intense and manic when you play forcefully. This sort of dynamic interaction can also be applied to the tremolo depth with a flip of the Depth switch. Switching to the Minus setting has an inverse effect on Speed and Depth. For example, playing with a gentler touch will speed up the tremolo, while digging in will slow it down.

Rating:

Buy If...

you're looking for a versatile and interactive tremolo that can deliver more unconventional sounds.

Skip If...

additional controls cause you additional frustration.

Pigtronix

Street $249

pigtronix.com

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When set to its most extreme Depth setting, there's even a bit of a signal boost that can provide some nice grit at the loudest part of the volume swell if your amp is at the point of overdriving. Though this can be perceived as signal coloration, the unit is actually remarkably transparent.

Additional controls allow you to further define the size and shape of the effect. Switching to the smoother sine waveform sounds more traditional. This setting is ripe for surfy and noirish mood explorations. The sawtooth waveform sounds more modern—perfect for choppier and percussive "How Soon is Now"-style Johnny Marr trem, or even more radical settings. The harder settings in particular are even more effective when used with the stereo output and two amps. At times, this can become positively brain-warping. Even in subtle settings, however, the combination of the Tremvelope's dynamic control and stereo capabilities can be incredibly surreal and spacious.

The Verdict

The Tremvelope reflects just how far an imaginative pedal builder can go with the simplest effects, and the features describe here really only begin to scratch the surface. The Pigtronix Tremvelope is exceptionally well built. It's also supremely dynamic and highly interactive, and if you're open to what more radical applications of tremolo can do for your songs and playing, the Tremvelope can return your curiosity in spades.

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EARTHQUAKER DEVICES
BIT COMMANDER

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

Rating:

Buy If...
you're looking for funky and futuristic sounds that are truly responsive to the touch.

Skip If...
synthy tones make you squirm.

EarthQuaker Devices
Street $175
earthquakerdevices.com

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Analog synth sounds have a polarizing effect among musicians. For some players, they are cornball relics—the sonic embodiment of cheese. But while synth sounds will remain synonymous with the era of polyester-based tailoring and/or anxiety about robots, time has proven that the sounds of sines, squares, oscillators, and filters working together can be musically powerful.

EarthQuaker Devices, an Akron, Ohio, company that has made waves over the last few years with a fast-growing line of mean fuzz boxes and unique delay and modulation units, seems to understand the inherent musicality of synths. Its recently released Bit Commander analog guitar synthesizer has an amazing capacity for enhancing melody lines, retaining definition in a variety of musical situations, and making sounds that, in the right context, sound just plain beautiful.

Synth Simplicity

Part of the Bit Commander's musicality is rooted in its simple architecture. Rather than get carried away with multiple wave types, envelopes, or oscillators, EarthQuaker based the Bit Commander's sound on a single square wave, the relative level of which can be adjusted with the Base control. The top three knobs control the level of the octave voices. Sub is two octaves down from the base tone. Down 1 is a single octave down, and Up 1 is an octave up from the base. A Level knob works as a master volume for the summed effect, and the Filter control functions more or less as a tone control.

Together, it's an exceptionally well-executed layout that facilitates fast experimentation and tone tweaks on the fly. The controls are also wonderfully responsive.

A Toneful Monster

One of the real pleasures of the Bit Commander is how well the unit tracks fingering nuance. Quick, full-step slides, fast finger vibrato, hammer-ons, and legato work all retained full harmonic detail and percussive qualities, which few other synth pedals or octave pedals can pull off with such aplomb.

The Bit Commander also displays an impressive capacity for sustain—though, like any synth or octave pedal, this isn't always a sure thing. I worked out a few lead runs ending in dramatically sustained, full-step bends, only to have the bend fizz out every third try. When it does work out, the Bit Commander sings like a Frankensteined fusion of tenor and baritone vocalists and a Univox Super Fuzz—a combination that sounds wicked in funky and strutting band settings. That said, even the notes that hang the longest ultimately cut out very abruptly.

The square base tone assures that there's a fuzzy haze to just about anything you play on the Bit Commander. You can remove much of it by rolling back the Filter control. But in doing so you can lose the sweetest aspect of the Bit Commander's voice— a warm, round fuzz that's very much at home in the context of melodic leads while retaining a nasty, funky buzz that sounds like some future-shocked Marc Bolan.

The Bit Commander doesn't escape all the typical guitar-synth limitations, though: Bridge pickups can create high-end spikes that upset the harmonic balance of low octaves, true chords are all but impossible, and tracking notes much below the 7th—or *maybe* the 5th—fret can get very glitchy, too. However, it's *much* less so than with a lot of synth and octave pedals, and at lower master volume levels, I was actually able to play some fat and precise glitch-free bass lines. In general, though, all the money is up past the 7th fret for the Bit Commander.

The Verdict

You don't often think of guitar synths as pedalboard staples, but because the Bit Commander is no one-trick pony—it has the musicality to work as a sonorous octave fuzz, a funky baritone substitute, or a secret weapon for harmonized leads—it could become one for a certain segment of the guitar-playing population. The octave voice controls all have an impressive range and responsiveness that really makes experimentation rewarding. It's also a very forgiving unit built around an inherently simple circuit with a clear and powerful basic voice. In all, it's a delicious-sounding and elegant, if demented, piece of work.

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-JUAN ALDERETE (BASSIST, THE MARS VOLTA)

WWW.DWARFCRAFT.COM

Z.VEX
INSTANT LO-FI JUNKY

BY JORDAN WAGNER

PREMIER GUITAR PREMIER GEAR

Rating:

Buy If...
you're looking to experiment with new textures in your guitar tone.

Skip If...
you're perfectly happy with keeping your tone's high fidelity.

Z.Vex Effects
Street $219 (Vexter version);
$349 (handpainted version)
zvex.com

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The Lo-Fi Loop Junky remains among the most unique pedals in Zachary Vex's pedal line, which is saying a lot. It didn't fill many common needs when it debuted, even by the adventurous standards of loopers. But it produced one of the most distinctive ranges of tones you could ever use for looping—a mixture of compression and vibrato-warble that gave loops the character of warped records, warbling tape, and other very lo-fidelity treats. And while its merits weren't as obvious to straight-ahead players, looping players that wanted to add a little more character—well, in this case a *lot* more character—to their loops without tap dancing around three other pedals fell in love with the Lo-Fi Loop Junky.

With the Instant Lo-Fi Junky, Z.Vex adapts the effects that make the Loop Junky's loops so, well, *junky* and puts them in a stomp box without the looper. The result is a tone-tweaking tool that very happily strays from the ordinary.

Instant Gratification

Engineer Joel Korte designed the Instant Lo-Fi Junky by reverse-engineering Vex's original Lo-Fi Loop Junky circuit. But the Instant Junky isn't just the Lo-Fi Looper's circuit minus the looper. Instead, the Instant Lo-Fi Junky uses a different set of components with a combination of compression and vibrato effects to replicate the tones you get using the original Loop Junky's recorded tone.

While the effects can be radical, the pedal is among the simplest to operate in the Z.Vex product line—with a set of knobs for Volume, Tone, Vibrato Speed, Vibrato Depth, and a Mix control for moving between full-compression and full-vibrato. There's also a tiny, 3-way switch at the top of the pedal's face that changes the vibrato shape from sine to triangle or square waves. Either a 9V battery or a standard Boss-style power supply, drawing less than a miniscule 20 mA of power, powers the analog, true-bypass circuit.

Clean Up This Junk!

For all intents and purposes, the Instant Lo-Fi Junky houses some of the wackiest tones in the entire Z.Vex line. But there are also very usable and more conventional sounds within. Rest assured, the Loop Junky's strange, vibrato-laden murk is perfectly preserved here, along with the option of mixing in some out-of-this-world compression.

Before I delved into the lo-fi emulation aspects of the pedal, I plugged it in between a Fender Blacktop Telecaster and Fender '65 Twin Reverb reissue, and turned the Comp/Lo-Fi knob all the way to the left. Playing the opening passage to "The Wind Cries Mary" had me twitching in my seat—the compression is staggeringly good—reminiscent of Z.Vex's brightly-voiced Super Hard-On booster, but with an unbelievable amount of sustain and smoother response. It's nearly worth the price of admission alone.

Moving the Comp/Lo-Fi control clockwise brings the pedal's lo-fi processing into play. With the mix full-on, the tone is just as gloomy and warbly as the Z.Vex's looper, with the added bonus of being able to drastically change the waveform from smooth rises and falls to sudden, immediate pitch-changes. Pulling the Mix control back gave me a warm, heavenly chorus that was reminiscent of a beloved vintage Boss CE-1 that I once owned, but with more clarity and a wider scope. Chorus may be one of the more conventional and familiar effects out there, but Z.Vex managed to put their own stamp on it in this case.

The Verdict

Those aching to apply the Lo-Fi Loop Junky's granular tonal-qualities to their direct guitar-sounds will be extremely satisfied with the Instant Lo-Fi Junky. The Instant Lo-Fi Junky's tone sounds much like its looper counterpart, and has an incredible compression tone for cleaner playing to boot, in addition to some of the coolest chorus tones available on the market. A lo-fi star to be sure, but one you can use in proper company too.

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MXR NOISE CLAMP

BY JORDAN WAGNER

Rating:

Buy If...

you like to stack drive and fuzz pedals, but can't deal with wild feedback problems.

Skip If...

you need a traditional noise gate to cut out background hiss from a noisy amp.

Dunlop Manufacturing, Inc.

Street $79

jimdunlop.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

MXR pedals need no introduction. The stamp the company put on the music world with the Distortion+, Phase 90, Dyna Comp, and others is enormous. So as veterans of the pedal business, it seems only natural that MXR would explore ways to control the noise and hiss that can drive some pedal users to madness. One of their newest pedals—the Noise Clamp—is designed to eliminate those annoyances without sacrificing the tone of your guitar or amplifier.

Clamp On, Clamp Off

The Noise Clamp was designed for players with a lot of pedals in their signal chain—especially where overdrives and distortions are stacked on top of one another. The Noise Clamp doesn't operate like a traditional noise gate, which cuts the background noise of a whole chain, often at the expense of the guitar's tone. Instead, the Noise Clamp detects the amount of noise present in your bypassed guitar-tone, and lowers the hiss and extremities to that level when pedals in the Noise Clamp's effects loop are engaged.

Using the Noise Clamp could not be easier. Simply chain your more unruly effects into the pedal's Send and Return jacks, and connect your guitar and amp to the Input and Output jacks. Normally, the loop is always active, even when the pedal is off. Though you can set the loop to work only when the pedal is engaged by flipping a little switch inside the pedal. A knob to control the volume threshold of the gate is the only control on the Noise Clamp's face.

I'll Use The Clamps On Ya!

Using a 1978 Gibson Les Paul Custom into a 2011 Mesa/Boogie Multi-Watt Dual Rectifier, I connected a Fulltone OCD overdrive, Big Muff NYC reissue fuzz, and a Strymon El Capistan delay and played my guitar dry for a few notes. After stomping on the bypass switch, I gradually brought up the Trigger knob and tried to find the sweet spot where the noisy feedback of the OCD juicing the Big Muff disappeared, but the delay's trails continued to come through smoothly. It was really quite miraculous how well the Noise Clamp pulled out the screeching feedback. But I had to be careful not to set the Trigger control too high with this high-gain setup—at around 3 o'clock, individual notes were subject to a little latency. Higher settings caused the notes to die out with a strange squelching sound.

To see just how well the pedal would handle an even noisier rig, I setup a Fender '65 Twin Reverb reissue with a 2011 Fender Standard Stratocaster, and ran a Boss Metal Zone in the pedal's loop. The Noise Clamp didn't cut out the natural 60-cycle hum of the Stratocaster's pickups that much—a beautiful thing. But it tightened up the tone of the Boss' pedal considerably. If pickup noise is part of the noise that bugs you most, you might be better off with a dedicated noise gate. But it's remarkable how well the Noise Clamp can selectively squelch noise elsewhere in the chain.

The Verdict

MXR's new Noise Clamp is a great choice for players looking to reign in the feedback and noise issues that are inevitable from stacking overdrive units. It isn't a typical noise gate, so it won't quiet down a noisy amplifier or pickups. But if you're less affected by the inherent noise of your guitar and favorite amplifier, the Noise Clamp can do wonders.

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VOX
VDL1 DYNAMIC LOOPER

BY AL SANTANGELO

Rating:

Buy If...

you want maximum control over multiple loops/phrases in a live situation.

Skip If...

loop storage is of paramount importance.

Vox Amplification

Street $249

voxamps.com

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Musicians always have tunes running through our heads. Sometimes though, we may not even know what's in there until something like the Vox VDL1 Dynamic Looper comes along and lets them out. The VDL1 can unleash creativity in a lot of ways. And though it has the capacity for the simplest forms of looping, it's also packed with less common looping functionality and effects that can inspire tunes and spice up a performance in unexpected ways.

Dynamic Duo

The VDL1 is built around two built-in effects processors and an expression pedal. It gives you 90 seconds recording time between two independent loops that you can split however you like, with a 10-second minimum. By recording separate phrases for each loop, you can play back either, or both, or variably blend the two and add effects, all with a tap of the foot.

You also can overdub repeatedly, layering phrases onto the loops using Vox's Sound on Sound technology. Existing phrases can be re-sampled and re-recorded using editable loop effects, including Reverse, Speed, Stutter, Volume and Crossfade. Aside from the ability to layer multiple effects, it also lets you make a loop with a different length than the original.

An internal metronome can be set by either tapping a footswitch or via a knob input, and the Loop Quantize function automatically adjusts the recorded loop to the specified tempo and time signature, which is a great way to tame what can turn into loop tangle very quickly. Recording can be started manually with a footswitch, or with the auto-record feature, which initiates loop recording once you start playing.

Effects like delay, reverb, wah, bass/acoustic simulation, distortion, chorus, and flange can be applied to both inputs. The effects are also editable, which really expands the expressive power of the pedal and effects. The distortions are surprisingly meaty, while the flanger and chorus have considerable depth and can be modified with the expression pedal. The reverbs are realistic, but also enable a lot of cool, sci-fi effects that can radically alter a loop. If you'd rather focus on the loops instead, there are 50 factory presets and 50 user-definable presets you can use.

Good Times on Top of Good Times

On early tests of the pedal, I recorded a single-chord rhythm using a standard distortion pre-effect onto the first loop. Using the synth bass sim, I overdubbed a simple bass line over that phrase on the same loop. On the second loop, I recorded a quick lead riff, then overdubbed another, similar riff, but with about half of it overlapping the first. At that point, I was able to play back the chord and bass loop while using the control pedal with the Volume loop effect to bring the lead riffs in or out of the mix. Switching to the Modulation loop effect, I put a controllable phaser on the lead riffs, which produced a very cool phased wah/voice effect. It takes some practice to get everything to flow just right, but not *too* much, and the effect of all the loops and effects running together is very cool.

The Reverse, which uses the control pedal to move from regular and reverse play, is a load of fun to experiment with. When the pedal is all the way down, the loop plays normally. With the pedal all the way back, your loop plays in reverse. Various points between the two mix forward and reverse loops, which can sound positively wild.

The VDL1 has several features to make sure you don't get totally lost in the pedal's many possibilities—including undo/redo functions for overdubs. But it's important to keep in mind that once the power is off, the unit is reset. It's too bad there isn't removable storage in the form of an SD card, or at least a USB connection to export files.

The Verdict

The VDL1 has a lot of looping power for a compact 10.5" by 9" stompbox. The included effects sound great, the looping/overdubbing ability are impressive, and if you're familiar with the basics of looping, you'll be able to navigate the basics with relative ease. Getting started may be frustrating if you're not familiar with loopers and multi-effects units, but some time learning the ins and outs of the machine will yield a bounty of sounds. The inability to store effects loops is a considerable drawback. But if you're more interested in what you can accomplish on the fly and the ability to alter your loops drastically from a single unit, the Vox VDL1 Dynamic Looper is a very powerful tool.

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BOSS
RC-30 LOOP STATION

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Rating:

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Skip If...
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Roland Corp.
Street $299
bossus.com

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Boss has been a major player in the looping-pedal game for years. The company sponsors the annual Loop Station World Championship, and their flagship RC-50 is regarded as one of the Cadillacs of looping pedals. And the new RC-300 ranks among the most formidable looping machines ever made. Boss has also consistently made more accessibly priced and compact loopers, and the new twin-pedal RC-30, which replaces the popular RC-20XL, adds new functionality and greater recording capability—up to 3 hours and 99 phrases—that tops the old RC-20XL's 16 minutes and 11 phrases by a significant margin.

Space Base

As you might expect, given the number of features on the RC-30, the control panel is fairly packed. On the left, you'll find the Loop FX selector section, with Type and On/Off buttons and a list of five effects with Status indicator lights. To the right are the unit's Select buttons, Status indicator lights, and faders for tracks 1 and 2. Furthest right is the Memory section, which includes an LED screen, buttons for scrolling (up and down) and for Write and Delete. Two Level knobs, Mic and Rhythm (with three corresponding buttons labeled Type, On/Off, and Tap Tempo), round out the control panel.

The RC-30's two footswitches are located on the bottom portion of the pedal. Its input and output jacks are located on the rear panel, and they consist of an XLR input with an on/off switch for phantom power, an aux input, stereo inputs and outputs, an external footswitch jack, a USB input, and a DC input. The RC-30 can also be powered with the six included 9V batteries.

Effects to Boot

The RC-30 has five built-in effects—Bend Down, Step Phaser, Sweep Filter, Tempo Delay, and Lo-Fi. These effects sound pretty cool (I particularly liked the Step Phaser) and the time-based effects automatically sync up to the tempo, which is a big plus. In general, though, the effects are pretty bare bones and you can't control any of the effect parameters. In one situation, the delay level was kind of high for my taste and a minor tweak would have made it perfect, but I was stuck with it. It's still nice to have built-in effects though, especially if your sound isn't heavily reliant on them and you just want an occasional smattering for color.

Keep It in Time

A tricky thing with looping can be getting your loops to start and stop exactly in time. Needless to say, doing so is vital, because unless you're working in a more experimental, improvised context, an ill-timed loop can derail a whole tune. Normal recording mode, where you manually press the pedal to start and stop a loop section, is the unit's default setting. But the RC-30 also offers a few recording modes that are nearly foolproof ways to get in time. Auto recording starts recording when the RC-30 hears you playing, and Count-in recording (which I found the easiest to use) will start recording after a one-measure count in. The RC-30 also provides 10 simple built-in rhythms you can use as timing guides.

Having two separate tracks is a neat feature, though the tracks are not as independent as you might expect, as they both have to be the same length. You can't loop, say, a four-measure rhythm guitar phrase, and record an endless solo over it. You'd have to record the rhythm part consecutively as many times as you'll need for the soloing track. Still, the potential for thick, texture-rich tracks is remarkable once you master this function.

The Verdict

Unless you're a hardcore looper who bases a whole performance on loops, the RC-30 likely has what you need to explore the many textures and compositional possibilities looping brings to the table. The loops sound great, there's no noise or signal loss to speak of, the effects (if limited) can add extra color, and getting in sync is a breeze. Boss' extensive experience with looping is also apparent in the RC-30's intuitive interface and the way it tackles some of the most common looping challenges. And if you plan to investigate looping as a way of expanding your sonic repertoire, you can't go wrong with this very capable unit.

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Premier Guitar, May 2011
analogalien.com

TECH 21
BASS BOOST CHORUS

BY DAVID ABDO

Rating:

Buy If...
you seek an intuitive, great-sounding chorus pedal for electric bass.

Skip If...
you're on a budget or loathe this polarizing effect.

Tech 21
Street $189
tech21nyc.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Many bassists of varied music styles have found a use for chorus in their arsenal. That "underwater" tone can be heard in everything from '70s fusion to '80s New Wave, '90s grunge, and modern rock. In a market full of chorus pedals, Tech 21 offers a versatile option with the Bass Boost Chorus, which provides the tones of classic chorus effects while solving some the issues that often arise when applying chorus to bass frequencies.

Sea Change

Tech 21 believes that because most chorus pedals are designed for guitar, the resulting tones can be brittle and thin, with an unpleasant warbled effect when used with bass. By introducing a Detune control that adjusts the secondary pitch of the signal, Tech 21's Bass Boost Chorus is able to provide chorus without that queasy-feeling modulation or loss of bottom end. The Detune control creates a thicker chorus effect, while preserving the fundamental characteristics of each note. The pedal also has a Multi Voice switch that incorporates a third voice to detune, providing a wider, three-dimensional chorus effect. The Mix knob allows you to control the amount of effect in the direct sound, while the Tone knob enables you to dial in brighter or mellower flavors. The handy Boost knob ensures that the overall output does not diminish when the pedal is engaged. The Bass Boost Chorus also includes the standard Speed and Depth controls found on traditional chorus effects.

Chorus Ahoy!

As I set up for my maiden voyage with the Bass Boost Chorus, it seemed as if Tech 21 was inviting my bass on a nautical journey with the underwater graphic on the metal casing. A glance inside the casing revealed a well-organized interior, with solid pots and clean solder points. There is also a user-friendly, no-screw battery cover that provides easy access to the 9V connector.

I plugged the Bass Boost Chorus into the effects loop of a Glockenklang Soul head with two Space Deluxe 1x12 cabinets. Using a Dingwall Z3 5-string, I experimented with the sample settings provided in the manual. Settings titled "Cure Bass" and "Hooky" were very accurate in emulating edgy alt-rock bass tones, particularly when wielding a pick. Soloing the bridge pickup and using the "Jaco Fretless" setting effectively executed the sound made famous in Pastorius' classic "Continuum." These settings (along with seven others) provided hours of fun and inspired chorus creations of my own. Extended-range bassists will also be pleased with how the pedal handles notes on the 5th string.

The Bass Boost Chorus proved its worth in live situations. While the Speed and Depth knobs created chorus effects similar to other pedals on the market, the other features enabled it to do a lot more than that. Manipulating the Detune, Level, and Multi Voice functions created thick choral textures while preserving my bass signal in the mix. The Tone knob provided nice variances in brightness: Boosting it, I was able to create glorious crunch when playing with a pick, and cutting it warmed up the sound when playing fingerstyle.

The Verdict

If you've been frustrated with the performance of other bass chorus pedals, the Tech 21 Bass Boost Chorus may just be the solution. It provides functional modulating options that work well with vintage and modern basses, as well as signal boosters that will assist in defending your sonic space. It may be on the pricier side of the pedal spectrum, but its features are worth the extra loot. If you play in a cover band, use a lot of effects, or desire another dimension to your bass tone, dive in and check out the Bass Boost Chorus.

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IBANEZ
TS9B BASS TUBE SCREAMER

BY JORDAN WAGNER

Rating:

Buy If...
you need fat, dynamic overdrive with a natural, uncompressed feel.

Skip If...
you need raging, molten distortion.

Ibanez
Street $119
ibanez.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

In the world of overdrive pedals, Ibanez has been considered a king for decades. Since the introduction of the overdrive pedal that changed the world—the Tube Screamer TS808—the company has enjoyed a devoted following of professional and amateur musicians from all walks of music. Recently, Ibanez shared the love with bassists by debuting the TS9B, a variation of the famed TS9 that's revoiced for more low-end growl and modified for even more tonal control.

The Bass Tube Screamer's control layout is about as simple as it gets: The TS9's single Tone knob has been divided into two separate EQ controls, and a Mix knob has been thrown in to give the TS9B a grand total of five knobs—Level, Gain, Bass, Treble, and Mix. The pedal sits on a thick rubber pad, where there's also access to the 9V battery door. Inside the pedal, you can see a neat, all-analog circuit with well-soldered connections.

Screaming for Vengeance

One of the things Tube Screamers are known for, especially TS9s and vintage TS808s, is touch sensitivity. And the good news is that the TS9B bears the same sonic traits as its forebears in this regard—it really shows off its muscle when you dig into the strings. To test it, I used a Fender American Special Jazz bass through a Genz Benz ShuttleMAX 12.0 driving Genz Benz 1x12 and 1x15 cabinets. While fingerpicking a groove on the low strings, the TS9B delivered just a tiny amount of grit with the Mix and Gain knobs maxed. It wasn't until I hit the strings hard with a pick or slap technique that the pedal thundered like an ominous storm, and there was a tinge of fuzz-like distortion on the high end.

Backing off the Gain a bit and experimenting with the Mix control, I realized how heavily these controls interact. Because I tend to use aggressive picking-hand attack when playing rock bass lines, I didn't need to max the Gain to get heavier grooves. Being an overdrive rather than a distortion, the TS9B naturally doesn't dish out gain levels suitable for extreme metal, but it provides more than enough to create well-defined and multi-dimensional bass lines. The tone is quite wooly in the midrange, with a vicious amount of low end accessible from the Bass control. And with the pedal's incredible sensitivity, I could control the amount of grit simply by adjusting my picking style.

When I wanted to put down a fat foundation for blues-oriented material, I found the Gain and Mix controls among the most useful for changing music styles. Upping the Bass knob, lowering the Treble knob considerably, and setting the Mix control a hair shy of high noon was one of my favorite settings for this style. With a moderate Gain setting, the TS9B served up a subtle low-end boost—and there was plenty more to add by increasing the Mix setting. This is a great way to tailor the bass tone for a suitably girthy foundation, upper-end bite, and volume in the overall mix, while still having complete control over the tone from the bass's pickup controls.

The Verdict

For bassists looking to put a little more attitude in their arsenal, the Bass Tube Screamer TS9B is an excellent choice. It won't do all the work for you, but for those who know how to get a lot of dynamics out of their hands, it'll reward in spades. There's ample gain available, but not enough to compress the tone into sterility. For big, rock bass tones with plenty of dynamic range, the TS9B is definitely worth checking out.

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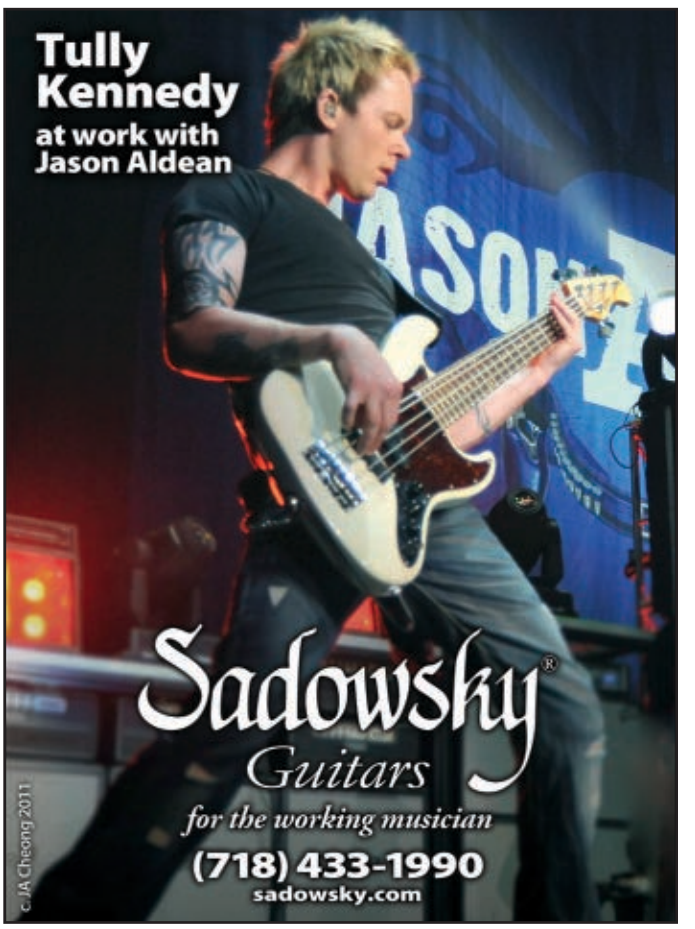

FISHMAN
FISSION BASS POWERCHORD FX

BY DAN BERKOWITZ

Rating:

Buy If...

you're looking to expand your musical palette and love the idea of letting your bass fill more sonic space.

Skip If...

you're playing in a thick mix and need a focused, conventional sound.

Fishman

Street $279

fishman.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

The Fishman Fission Bass Powerchord FX does some funky things by building grinding, root-fifth chords from single notes. It's the kind of sound that makes it virtually impossible to *not* start ripping out fat riffs that are both bass lines and crunchy power-chord rhythms all at once.

Unlike most sub-octave pedals, Fishman's Fission Bass generates pitches *above* the note you're playing. By engaging the Octave Up/Effect On footswitch, you get the fundamental *plus* a note an octave above it. Combine the first and second footswitches, and the Fission creates a fifth above your note—along with the upper octave. With the first and third switches engaged, you get the fundamental, the upper octave, and a fifth above *that* octave.

But wait—there's more. If you engage all three footswitches, the Fission creates notes one *and* two octaves above your fundamental, and then throws in a fifth between the two octaves. Sweet! Some bassists have compared the Fission to the legendary, out-of-production Akai UniBass, which is often fondly referred to as a "rhythm guitarist in a box." It's an appropriate description for the Fission Bass Powerchord, too—especially when dialing in the Overdrive control. Just imagine playing in a power trio when it's time for a guitar solo: Rather than leaving the guitarist to fill all the space around the bass line, simply kick in the Fission Bass and you can lay down a rich foundation for the guitarist to riff on.

Nuclear Fission

It's interesting that a pedal like this comes from Fishman, a company best known for natural-sounding acoustic gear. But they've clearly done their homework. The Fission delivers the company's usual quality in a sturdy metal case. And the four knobs, three footswitches, and three jacks feel durable and reliable. Happily, the 9V battery lives underneath, and there's a snap-off lid and slip-in contacts—so there are no battery leads to get pulled out of the circuit board. It was also nice to see instruction details printed on the bottom of the box, which is very useful unless you decide to attach the Fission to your pedalboard.

Setting up the Fission seemed daunting, initially, but the manual's Quick Start section made things easy. It suggests setting the Noise Gate and Overdrive controls to 9 o'clock, turning Tone all the way up, and keeping Effect Level all the way down. A stealthy, Trim knob on the right panel governs gain—just play normally and adjust it until the clip light only blinks on occasion. All of that done, it's a simple task to tweak possibilities and blend in the desired effect with the dry signal.

The Verdict

With a solid signal level, the Fission Bass tracked very well. It was fun playing classic, sustain-filled power-trio riffs, too. While the overdrive sounded a touch digital on its own, it would blend acceptably within a band setting. In all, the Fission Bass Powerchord FX is a quality effect that can quickly easily help you expand your role as a bassist.

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FUCHS PLUSH FX JERSEY THUNDER

BY JORDAN WAGNER

PREMIER GUITAR PREMIER GEAR

Rating:

Buy If...
you need to shape your bass tone further, but don't want to deal with the fuss of big EQ units.

Skip If...
you need overdrive or distortion.

Fuchs Audio Technology
Street $199
fuchsaudiotechnology.com

CLICKHere...
or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Coming from an audiophile background, Andy Fuchs started Fuchs Audio Technology with the intention of making the best tube amplifiers he could muster. Since then, his creations have captured the ears of such players as Al Di Meola, Warren Haynes, Joe Bonamassa, and Dweezil Zappa. Fuchs eventually branched out to pedal design with his critically successful Plush line of effects, and recently turned his eyes on bassists with the Jersey Thunder bass EQ and booster.

Jersey Devil

The Jersey Thunder comes in Fuchs' standard, cast-aluminum housing and sports a striking, purple powder-coated finish. With just two knobs to adjust the amount of gain and the shape of the EQ, it's a very simple pedal to operate. The Thunder boasts three custom-voiced EQ curves and gain boost settings, which are accessible via a 3-way switch located on the side of the unit.

Each of these three settings was crafted to solve the problems and headaches of audio engineers who deal with electric bass. The settings provide varying EQ slopes and gain levels to either boost lows, dial back low-mids, or add snap in the highs for bassists that use slap techniques. The 3-way switch offers immediate access to techniques engineers and soundmen typically use to shape the bass tone at the board so it sits well in the overall mix.

Blood and Thunder

If you're looking for a pedal that adds grind and dirt to your bass tone, the Jersey Thunder isn't going to be your cup of tea. What it does offer is many more tonal possibilities than a simple overdrive circuit can deliver. The pedal isn't designed to turn your bass tone into a roaring, fire-breathing demon—its purpose is to bring out the frequencies that make a bass stand out, some of which you might not even know are there until you turn on this unit.

With a 2011 Fender American Special Jazz Bass and a Genz-Benz ShuttleMAX 12.0, the Jersey Thunder kicked out some of the tightest, expansive lows I've heard from a bass EQ in some time. The dynamic range was perfectly preserved as I moved through a fingerpicked, Stevie Wonder-inspired groove, with the low end churning in and out like a heaving body of water as I dug into the strings, or let up with my picking hand. The Shape control was incredibly useful when using the low-end boost EQ slope, allowing me to precisely set just how much punch I wanted the pedal to generate, while keeping everything from going overboard.

Speaking of precise, I was really taken aback at just how perfectly tuned each of the three slope settings were. The scooped midrange setting didn't knock out too much of the low-mids to make the tone's definition disappear. And the high-boost setting brought out just the right amount of top end for meaty slaps and pops, without the irritating, razor-like highs that so many preset bass EQs deliver.

The Verdict

The Jersey Thunder is a stellar choice if you need to tighten up and give more definition to your bass tone, but want to accomplish the task with a compact, simple-to-operate stompbox. It's a great pedal for coaxing the best sounds from your bass and will especially appeal to those with a set-and-forget mindset.

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RUPPERT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
BASSWITCH IQ DI

BY PRESTON CLARKE

Sensing a void in the market for bassists that use multiple instruments in their set-up or those needing a beefy control unit for their pedalboards, Ruppert Musical Instruments set out to create the Basswitch IQ DI. What the company calls a "Swiss Army knife" for bassists, the Basswitch IQ DI is a preamp/dual-effects loop/A-B switcher/DI pedal that provides a multitude of options for live and studio situations, with Lehle switching technology to boot. Whether you're a virtuoso soloist or a multitasking bassist-for-all-seasons, life may have gotten less stressful for you.

Two Is More Than One

For starters, you're no longer at the mercy of abused DI boxes supplied by the venue—often beer-soaked and of questionable integrity—because the Basswitch has an XLR out that can go straight to the board. The unit also has two input channels, so you're able to have two basses with separate settings dialed-in simultaneously. But with just one instrument plugged into channel A, you can get a quick boost or a different EQ and effect(s) setting for another playing style, simply by switching to channel B. And there's not just one effects loop, but two. One passive serial loop for effects like compressors that you may want engaged all the time, and a second, switchable loop equipped with a Mix control that allows you to blend in an effect with the clean tone.

In Control

With a 4-string StingRay in hand, I ran the Basswitch into my Yamaha 01v mixing board and found the sound to be clean and surprisingly warm for it's solid-state components. And if you want that signal to be recorded clean so you can add effects later, there's a Pre/Post button allowing you to print the clean tone while you listen to the effected tone through your amp or headphones.

Running an Alesis NanoCompressor through the serial loop and a Maxon overdrive pedal through the mixing loop, I was able to dial-up just the right combination of warmth and grit I was craving using the Mix control. If you're like me and prefer vintage pedals, you won't have to worry about the clean signal and the effect return signal cancelling each other out. If they do, simply flip the Phase switch to invert the phase, and you're good to go. The Basswitch also has a separate tuner out, keeping your tuner out of the signal path, and a large mute button front and center. You can't miss it.

Instead of typical slider controls, there's a knob for each of the frequency ranges in the Basswitch's 4-band EQ, which boasts double parametric mids. While it's easy to sweep the spectrum with the EQ controls, it did take a little getting used to the knobs being in the reverse order of what I'm accustomed to, which is the highs on the right and the lows on the left. It's the exact opposite on the Basswitch. And while not a huge issue, marking the knobs with the same glow-in-the-dark paint used for the Basswitch logo would be helpful in low-light situations.

Rating:

Buy If...

you record and play out often, use effects, and want to be ready for anything.

Skip If...

you trust the house DI, or you have one tone for your bass and that's all you need.

Ruppert Musical Instruments

Street $599

basswitch.com

CLICKHere...

or scan this QR code with a mobile device to hear audio clips of this pedal at premierguitar.com/nov2011.

Packaged Well

The footswitches felt very solid and ready to take a healthy dose of not-so-delicate switching. The bottom of the Basswitch is completely flat and includes four, sturdy rubber feet that can easily be popped in or out. It's relatively thin—about an inch and a half at its thickest height—and about as wide as three Boss pedals placed side by side. Weighing just a hair over three pounds, this DI will not overload or overcrowd your pedalboard.

The Verdict

Whether using the Basswitch as a stand-alone DI or the master of a pedalboard, the Basswitch is a cool option for bassists who want to take control of their sound in a variety of situations. Though the inverted EQ controls do take some getting used to, it's a small price to pay for the peace of mind the Basswitch delivers. Now that this pedal exists, I expect a number of bassists won't want to be caught at a gig or recording session without it.

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ORANGE DARK TERROR

BY JORDAN WAGNER

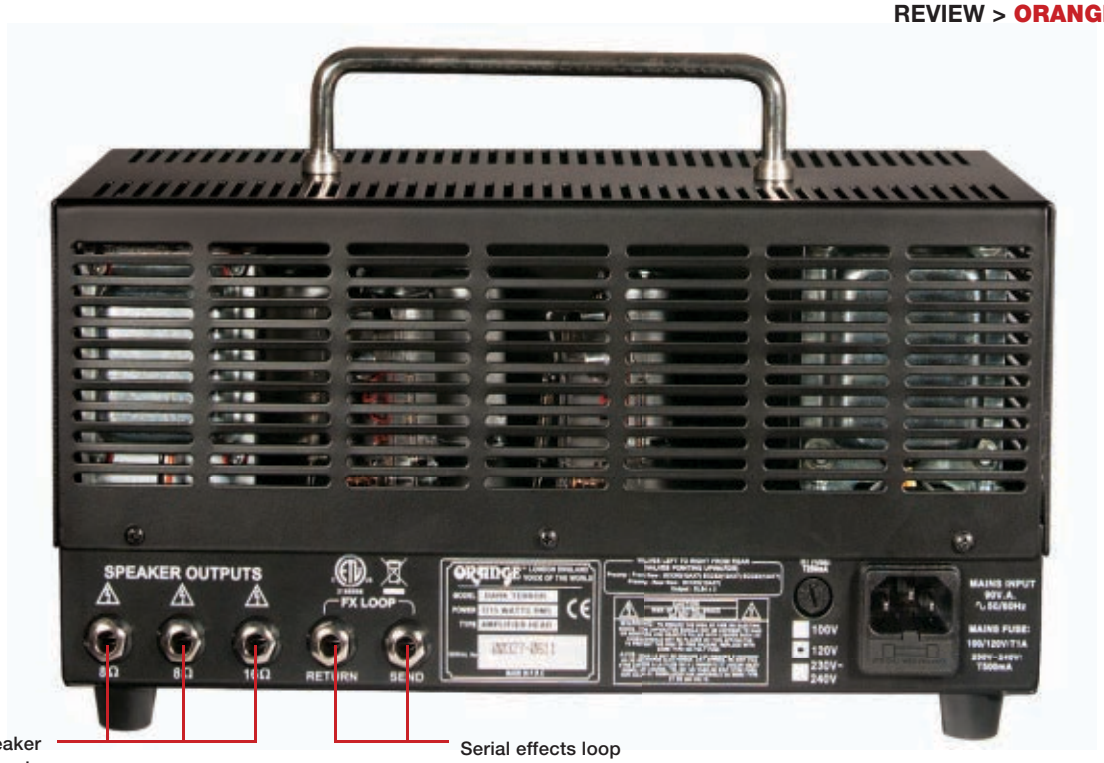
It seems as if every amp company has cast its iron into the low-wattage-amps fire. Orange, however, has consistently risen above the crowd with its massively popular Tiny Terror series—which, of course, started the whole trend back in 2006. The Tiny Terror was so well received because it has a genuinely unique and robust voice—including the juicy, flowing overdrive that Orange is famous for—in an incredibly compact and transportable package.

After the success of the Tiny Terror among rock and blues players, the company has now focused its sights on metal guitarists. Forbiddingly dubbed the Dark Terror, Orange's newest low-power amp builds upon its predecessor's winning recipe, while piling on heaps of molten gain and smoking overdrive that can stretch your notions of just how *huge* tiny can get.

Brother from Another Mother

Like the Tiny Terror, the Dark Terror takes a simplistic approach to making big sounds. Just three controls—Gain, Shape, and Volume—grace the little black devil's front panel. The Standby switch is a 3-way affair, too, offering the option of knocking power from the maximum of 15 watts to 7. Aside from the amp's tube-driven serial effects loop, there's not much else to tinker with. There's no channel switching—or any sort of clean option to speak of, for that matter.

At the heart of the raging little beast is an all-tube circuit driven by a pair of EL84 power tubes and two 12AX7 preamp tubes. The amp's effects loop is driven by a dedicated 12AT7 tube. All in all, the Dark Terror is a close cousin to the Tiny Terror, albeit with an appropriately goth enclosure and various circuit modifications that put much, much more gain at your command.



Welcome to the Terror Dome

At times, I was amazed at just how well the Dark Terror captured the quintessential Orange tone—especially at extremely distorted levels. With a 1978 Gibson Les Paul Custom and a Emperor 4x12 cabinet, the Dark Terror ripped and snarled with every downstroke and triplet I threw its way. The wide, expansive gain voicing that Orange is famous for is there in full force, with loose but massive lows, a rich midrange, and slightly fuzzy highs. It was hard not to think of the churning, thick tones from High on Fire's *The Art of Self Defense* and Celtic Frost's *Into the Pandemonium*—albums defined by a distinct and unique midrange grind that the Dark Terror delivers in quantity. The tone was even more focused when I hooked up an Epiphone Valve Jr. 1x12 cabinet, which tightened up the low end, smoothed out the highs, and made it easier for single-note lines to sit comfortably alongside heavy riffing.

The massive amount of gain on tap can also be one of the Dark Terror's downsides when it's turned up too high. With Gain above 3 o'clock, I had to drop the Shape control a bit to de-fuzz the high end. And in doing so, it often seemed the amp's midrange went away with the offending highs. With just 15 watts on tap, the power section is easily distorted, so it took some effort to find the proper balance between knob settings and a pick attack that wouldn't drive the front end too hard for rhythm work.

If you're hoping to coax any sort of *truly* clean tones out of the Dark Terror, you'll probably be disappointed. While I was able to get some decent clean-ish tones by rolling my guitar's volume knob down and setting the amp's Gain control lower, they retained a tinge of overdrive that was impossible to dial out if I played with anything more than the lightest pick attack. Attempts to do so, however, led to some very cool tones, revealing the amp's dynamic range and pick sensitivity at lower gain levels.

Switching to a 1978 Greco EC-700 Les Paul copy—which has pickups more in the PAF range—I was able to squeeze out some really great-sounding southern rock rhythm tones, à la Skynyrd's "Gimme Three Steps." The dynamics and overtones that I got with the Volume control low and the Gain control halfway up were almost more impressive than the amp's fully cranked tones.

The Verdict

Orange's Dark Terror builds something relatively massive on top of the Tiny Terror's rock-solid foundation. That's not the whole story, however. There may not be much to speak of in the way of clean tone, but if you're adept at using your guitar's onboard controls, the low-gain tones and dynamics are stellar. On the whole, the tones are classic Orange and infused with enough gain to satisfy even the most discerning stoner-metal enthusiast. And if your bag is modern hard rock with a dash of those characteristic fuzzy Orange highs and mids, the Dark Terror might just scare you silly.

Rating:

Buy If...

you seek fantastically massive overdrive tones in a miniscule package.

Skip If...

you absolutely must have sparkling cleans.

Orange Amps

Street $649

orangeamps.com

CLICKHere...

or use a mobile device to watch a video review of the amp at

premierguitar.com/nov2011

FRAMUS HOLLYWOOD DC

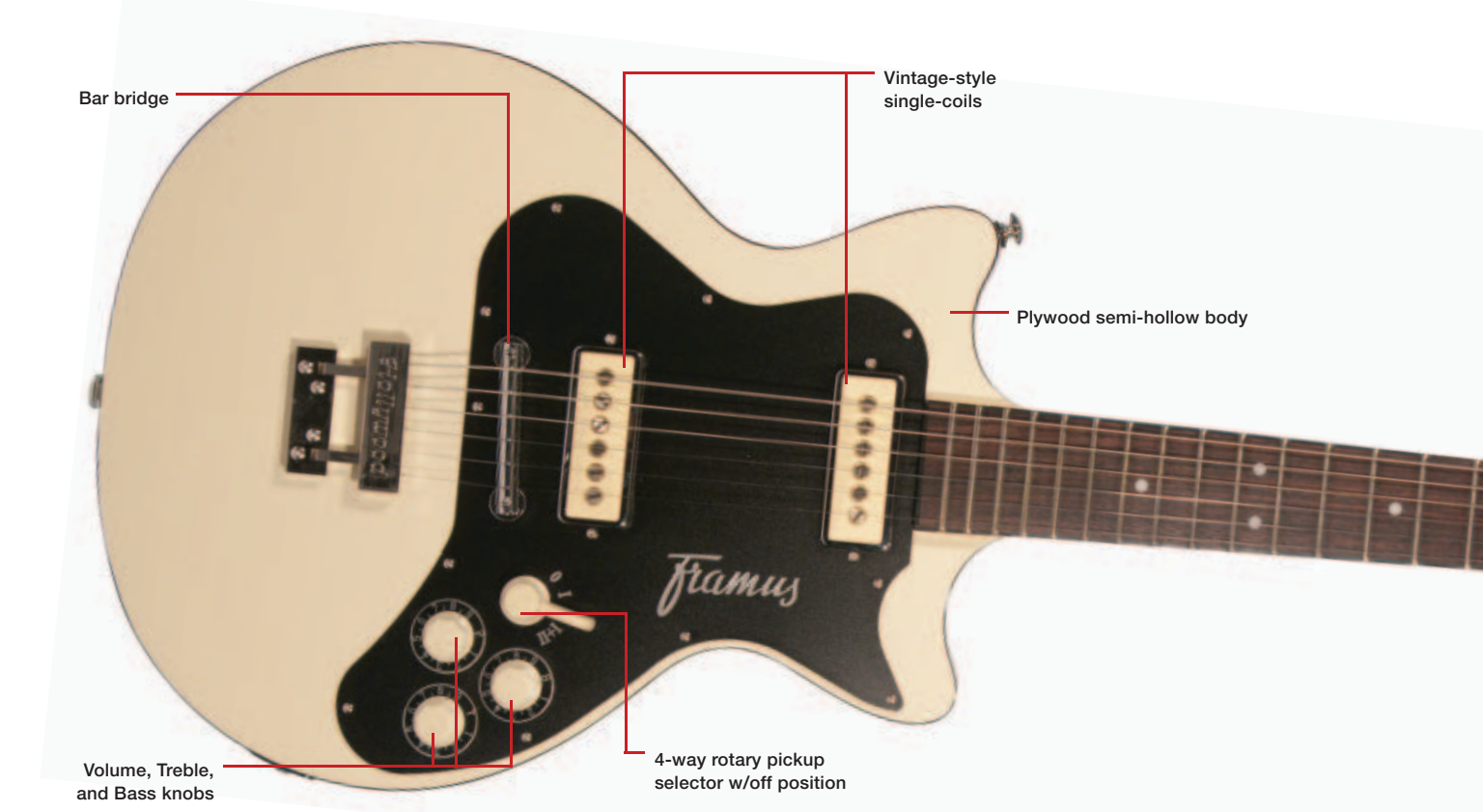
BY DIMITRI SIDERIADIS

As the big American guitar manufacturers were swelling in size and success during the rock 'n' roll explosion of the '60s, European manufacturers were also evolving and enjoying a similar—though still unique—trajectory. By the mid '60s, the largest among them was Germany's Framus International, a brand with global recognition and a full line of instruments, from solidbody and hollowbody electrics to steel- and nylon-string acoustics, banjos, lap-steel guitars, and other stringed instruments. However, bankruptcy eventually forced Framus into almost 20 years of hibernation before it was revived by Warwick in 1995. It has since flourished and become a major player in Europe once again, thanks to its wide range of guitars and amplifiers. This year, the company stepped up its game in the US market by opening a flagship store in lower Manhattan and releasing an Earl Slick signature model that was co-designed with the New York-based former David Bowie sideman.

The new 24 3/4"-scale Hollywood DC is based on the original Hollywood 5/131—a model that originated as Framus' late-'50s bid to meet the demand for rock-oriented guitars. Produced until 1966, it featured a set neck, semi-hollow construction with a laminate top and back, and a pair of single-coils. This accessibly priced, Korean-made reissue retains the features, pawnshop attitude, and playability of the original—all with style that stands apart from the pack.

Sweet Cream

While there's no shortage of retro-styled guitars today, many of them lack the visual balance that made the vintage classics so beautiful. In this respect, the Hollywood DC is a welcome breath of fresh air. Its curves are modest rather than wonky, its body is compact and ultra light, and its controls and hardware are cool yet functional and discreet. The polished cream finish on our review model has a quality look and is a great match for the dark rosewood fretboard and black binding. The aged plastic parts, bone-colored Graph Tech nut, and brass truss-rod cover with traditional Framus emblem complement the vintage look. The rotary pickup selector and universal Bass/Treble tone knobs remind you that you've picked up something a bit removed from American design convention. The tailpiece and bridge are surprisingly austere—height is the only adjustment you can make on this slotted, palm mute-friendly bridge—and they contribute to the Hollywood's funky vibe. A true headstock inlay (rather than a painted-on motif) would have provided



the finishing touch. Instead, the headstock graphics are the most significant deviation from the original design.

The first thing I noticed when I picked up the Hollywood was its light weight. The solid rim and plywood top and back make the mostly hollow body a little Danelectro-like in construction (though Danos use masonite tops and backs). The mahogany neck has a substantial heel, but upper-fret access is still quite easy. In many ways, the Hollywood felt something like a Les Paul Jr./Danelectro hybrid—comfortable and impressively balanced. The neck profile is somewhere between a medium-to-shallow C and, combined with the relatively flat 14" fretboard radius, is fast playing and bend friendly. The fretwork was especially impressive—the nickel-silver frets were excellently leveled and crowned. All these points combined with the aforementioned features to add up to a quality, fun experience with very few rough edges to distract from the music-making.

> **" ... the Hollywood's real bread and butter is churning out vintage rock bark, textured punk thrash, and cutting alt-rock tones."**

Sturm und Drang

The Framus's unplugged character is light and bright, with a lively acoustic quality that you can feel in the body. It's energizing to get this kind of volume from an unplugged electric, and it compelled me to play loudly right away. The Hollywood has a playful aura, one that inspires enthusiasm in a simple open chord. Plugged into a Carr Sportsman set to a clean, blackface-style sound, the neck pickup rendered these same acoustic qualities quite convincingly. There was a springy definition from the wound strings and a sparkling response from the higher unwound strings, that and it added up to satisfying tonal complexity. On both the neck and bridge pickups, the low-end response was tight and crisp—perfect for jangly, early-'60s rock rhythms. The Hollywood's bridge pickup was bright and vocal, with a fair mount of twang that could cover a lot of surf- or blues-rock territory. But, as I was to discover when using a little overdrive, the Hollywood's real bread and butter is churning out vintage rock bark, textured punk thrash, and cutting alt-rock tones.

I cranked the Sportsman for natural distortion and put a VHT V-Drive in the signal path for a slight gain boost and a bit of high-end texture. With the bridge pickup selected, I got biting, Vox-like grit that brought to mind the punchy, syncopated riff in "Paperback Writer." As I cut back on the reverb, turned up the gain, and dialed in some mids, I was in a scorching Jack White tone zone that got better with the gradual onset of feedback. Compared to most solidbodies, the Hollywood DC made it fairly easy to coax feedback, which is undoubtedly attributable in part to the hollow construction. But the feedback was easily reigned in, too, and that controllable liveliness is one of the real signatures and surprises of this guitar. This is an instrument that can be pushed to the edge, but remain balanced enough to stay within the player's control.

Framus also did a great job with the overall voicing of the Hollywood—the bass never got muddy, and treble, though ample, never became unwontedly brittle or piercing. In fact, it retained clarity at every gain setting I used, and remained capable of cutting through the densest mixes.

The Verdict

Whether you want a fresh showpiece for the gig or an all-around rock performer with bite, the Hollywood DC is worth serious consideration. Although many players will likely wish the bridge were something like an intonatable Tune-o-matic, I found the guitar hugely addictive, and loved the fact that it nails almost all the features of its popular precursor while achieving professional-level build quality—all at around a grand. Exotic but timeless, it's a gimmick-free German design with lightweight simplicity and a bright voice and that begs to be slung over the shoulder and played.

Vintage-style tuners

Rating:

Buy If...
you need a versatile, cutting rock instrument with major head-turning capacity.

Skip If...
you need warmer jazz sounds or can't get down with the European styling.

Framus International
MSRP $999
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or use a mobile device to download audio clips of the guitar at

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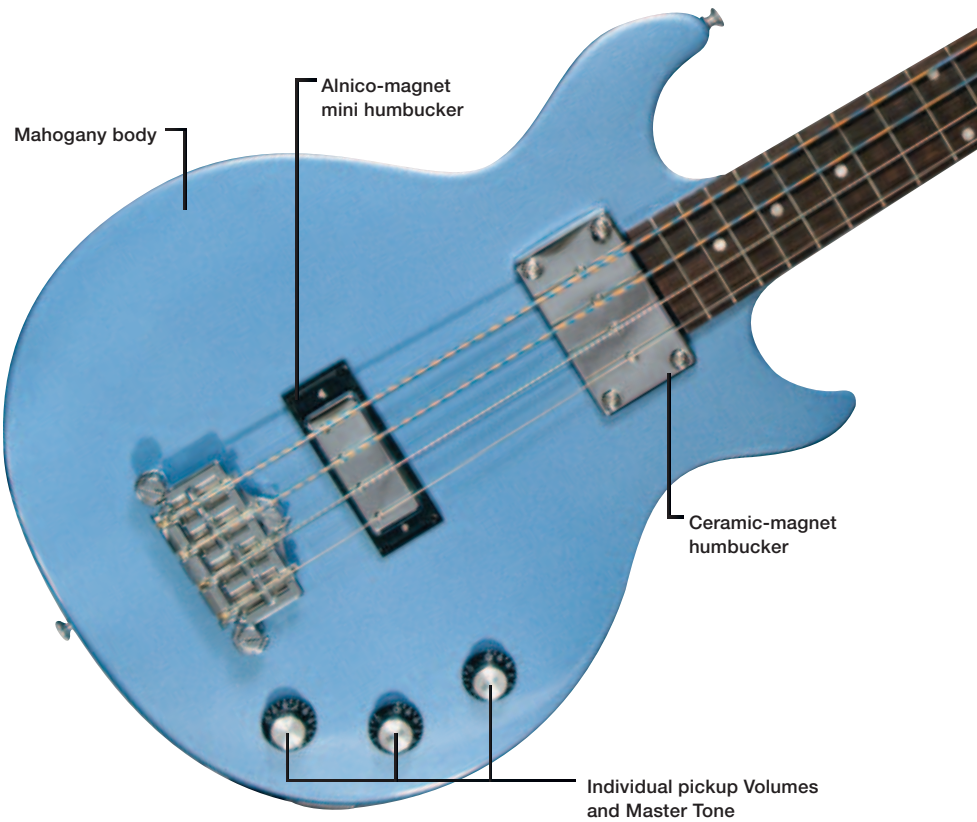
GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR DC BASS

BY JORDAN WAGNER

The short-scale bass is often misunderstood. Though the instrument was originally marketed for beginners, experienced bassists quickly discovered the ease of play and huge lows these axes provide. Guitarists also realized that the feel of a short-scale bass was similar to that of a 6-string guitar, making it a viable tool for players who wanted a taste of the low end, but didn't like the idea of getting used to a longer neck. Hot on the heels of their Thunderbird short-scale model, Gibson USA has released another short-scale bass, this one in the form of the famed Les Paul Junior DC. This Les Paul Junior bass draws influences from Gibson's storied EB-0, but also benefits from the addition of some new refinements.



Simple Sophistication

The Les Paul Junior DC bass is one of several Gibson USA basses the company is unveiling this year. Along with the Thunderbird short scale (release in March) was an oversized Les Paul bass. Bassists rejoice—we'll be seeing the Explorer and Flying V basses making their long-overdue return this year as well. And according to Gibson, 2012 also promises to be a big year for basses.

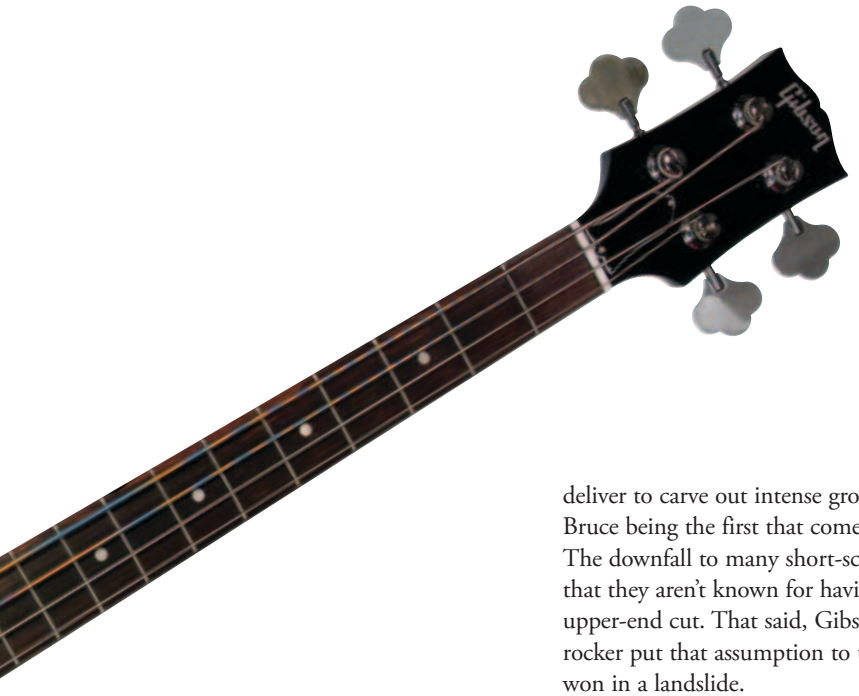
Put simply, Gibson's LP Junior DC bass is a stunning looker. The mahogany-slab body is finished in the company's gorgeous Pelham Blue nitrocellulose finish with a deep, baby-blue sparkle and luster. The instrument's 30.5" mahogany neck is set into the body and topped with a rosewood fretboard housing 20 medium-jumbo frets. And the large, shamrock-style Grover tuners work in tandem with an adjustable 3-point bridge that's also found on Gibson's Thunderbird models.

Being a short scale with large tuners, I assumed immediately that the instrument would be rather neck heavy, but it wasn't as evident as I thought it would be. The neck only drooped slightly after standing up with the bass and a nylon strap, and was extremely comfortable to hold in that position.

The appeal of this bass comes not only from its simple, classic look, but also from its no-nonsense electronics layout. Positioned at the neck is a huge TB Plus humbucking pickup, which is visually reminiscent of those giant humbuckers that sat in the neck position of the company's infamous EB-0 bass. Because a muddled high end is a common issue with neck humbuckers on basses, Gibson added a ceramic magnet to bring out more snap and highs. An alnico magnet-powered TB Mini humbucker is located in the bridge position for raunchy midrange and tones with a crisp upper end. Each pickup has its own Volume control for various amounts of blending, along with a single Master Tone control. Personally, I would have preferred separate tone controls for further tonal shaping, as some situations call for less highs on the bridge, blended with a sharp, neck tone.

Don't Call Me Junior!

There's nothing quite like a good short-scale bass. Even with the incorrect "beginner's instrument" moniker, some of the most famous players in rock, blues, and R&B have used the super-fat low end these models



deliver to carve out intense grooves—Jack Bruce being the first that comes to mind. The downfall to many short-scale basses is that they aren't known for having a ton of upper-end cut. That said, Gibson's baby-blue rocker put that assumption to the test, and won in a landslide.

Running into a TC Electronic Classic 450 head and matching 2x10 cabinet, the Les Paul Junior DC's neck humbucker delivered a surprising amount of meaty high end—and I do mean surprising. It wasn't sharp and bright—it was more of a thick, rope-like grind that cut through like a knife. The low end was huge and expansive, aided by the neck's short scale, which allows the strings to vibrate with less tension. I had to drop the neck pickup's Volume control down about 1/4 turn from full-blast to keep the sound at a manageable volume level—otherwise, it was just overpowering.

The appeal of this bass comes not only from its simple, classic look, but also from its no-nonsense electronics layout.

The bridge pickup served up its own spectrum of tones, leaning towards a rounded midrange and tighter lows. The output wasn't as hot as the neck pickup on its own, but a slight blend with the neck pickup poured out some delicious, late-'60s heavy-rock tones. This is where some of the best sounds from this bass originate—setting up the basic tone with the amp and the bridge pickup alone, and then gradually bringing in the neck pickup to fill in the extra space. As I worked through various levels of pickup mixing, I came across a really cool John Paul Jones-esque rock tone just by working with the neck pickup's volume to get varying degrees of dynamics. Bringing in the neck pickup more yielded a fat low end—à la "Dazed and Confused"—and dropping it right after the iconic riff transformed the tone into one that was perfect for the song's lead-heavy, driving chorus.

The Verdict

Short-scale basses are instruments that don't get *nearly* enough love from players. And the Gibson Les Paul Junior DC is one that deserves some serious attention—whether you're an experienced bassist or a guitarist looking to transition to the 4-string. On a short-scale model, the low end can be much wider and stronger than what's normally heard from longer-scale basses, so keeping an eye on your amp's bass control is a must. If you're after a comfortable bass with a cool look and killer rock tones, it's a must look.

Rating:

Buy If...

you're a bassist in need of bigger lows or a guitarist who wants a bass with somewhat the same feel as your 6-string.

Skip If...

the high-tension feel and snap of a long-scale bass is what's needed.

Gibson USA

Street $1229

gibson.com

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SHADOW NANOFLEX-6

BY GAYLA DRAKE PAUL

Hexaphonic pickups, which effectively consist of a pickup for each string, are a concept of amazing possibilities. In practical terms, however—and in the context of most traditional guitar music—they can represent a potential headache that only a mad scientist could love. However, Shadow's new Nanoflex-6 pickup system takes a very practical approach to the concept: It can be used in mono or stereo, and it's built around an intuitive interface with six volume controls—one for each string—that you can adjust on the fly to suit any musical situation.

The Great, Wide Open

Shadow sent us a Nanoflex-6 installed in a Martin HD-28 with Indian rosewood back and sides and a Sitka spruce top. Adding this system to a guitar does require a hole to be cut in its shoulder, which can be a tough sell for some players. If you're looking to make a workhorse guitar a little more versatile, however, it's worth considering.

The Nanoflex-6 pickup is an undersaddle unit that responds to both saddle pressure and, according to the company, vibrations in the instrument's body. Shadow says that's because it's actively amplified directly at the pickup itself.

The preamp in our HD-28 was an SH 4020A, with a Volume, a 3-band EQ, a phase-invert button, a Pan control, a built-in tuner, and six gain controls for each string's pickup. The latter are tiny, recessed knobs that you can adjust them with a fingernail or a pick.

Widescreen Sound

As you'd expect, the Pan control is for use with a stereo cable, and it is especially effective running through a PA. Keeping Pan completely counterclockwise yields a rich mono signal. When you turn it clockwise, the signal splits into a more panoramic sound. At 100 percent clockwise, the low E is distributed 100 percent to the left speaker, 75 percent of the A string is sent to the left speaker while 25 percent of it is sent to the right, and the D string output is equally distributed to the left and right speakers. Output from the highest three strings is distributed in a mirror image. This is incredibly cool, especially in a good room where people shut up and listen. Things open up even more when you start exploring effects on individual channels of your PA or amplifier array. A little reverb on one side—or different reverbs on each side—can lend an *enormous*, Phil Spector-esque production feel. Or you can create movement by adding a little chorus on the treble side, and maybe an octaver on the bass side. The possibilities are remarkable.

The Gain controls for each string are extremely useful, too. When I played in DADGAD with another guitarist who plays a lot of tunes in C, sometimes the ringing high D against his C and F was more irritating than cool. So I dialed back the first string about a quarter turn, and the results were amazing. The D was still there, but it was more of a delicate accent—as if a good mix engineer were optimizing the performance for an album. I also boosted the bass and the volume of the sixth string just a touch to compensate for the lack of a bass player. It boosted the volume of the low D, while the rest of the strings remained balanced and audible.

Through a good PA in a nice listening room, the stereo effect can be striking. At extreme settings, it makes a huge, enveloping sound—a real fantasy come true for some of us who dream of hearing the acoustic guitar as something much larger. Even over a monitor mix, I could hear the ambient sound in the room—pretty impressive. And you know you're on to something when a *soundman* says he wants the gear that's facilitating it all!

The Verdict

The Shadow Nanoflex-6 could be a secret weapon in the hands of an adventurous player in the vein of the effect-loving John Martyn. Envelope-pushing players may completely reinvent their sound and performance with this system. However, I'd like to see a direct-box version to avoid having to cut up a guitar. That said, the ability to control the Nanoflex-6 on the fly is a big part of this system's remarkable potential. And given the clarity, power, and richness of the pickup, it's a natural for high-end and harmonically complex instruments. If you're looking for a way to lend color, space, and size to your acoustic playing, the Shadow Nanoflex-6 system has a world of treats in store.

Rating:

Buy If...

your workhorse needs a pickup upgrade and you're ready for some serious acoustic adventures.

Skip If...

you don't want to cut a hole in your guitar.

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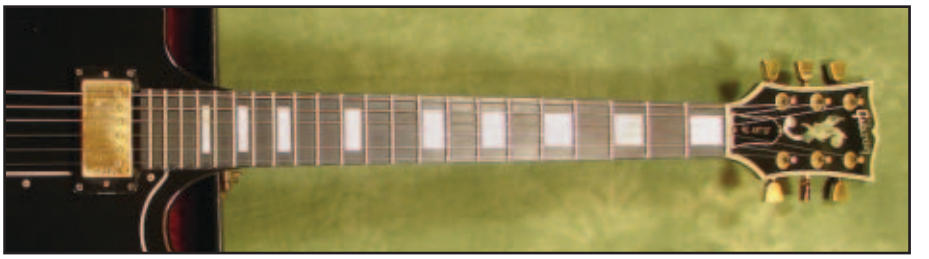
1979 Gibson RD Artist

BY CHRIS KIES

In 1977, Gibson looked to expand their guitar offerings by releasing a new batch of instruments intended to keep pace with the keyboard and synth craze happening at the time. Introducing the RD series (short for Research and Development), this line of guitars and basses were equipped with electronic circuitry for the first time in Gibson's history. The RD family offered a trio of 6-string guitars with the RD Standard, RD Artist, and RD Custom models, along with a pair of 4-string basses named the RD Artist and RD Standard. The RD Standard models lacked the active electronics that were developed with Bob Moog shortly before he left the Norlin Corporation (who owned both Gibson and Moog in the late '70s). Some notable RD artists include Jimmy Page who wielded his '77 RD Artist during Zep's performance of "Misty Mountain Hop" at Knebworth in 1979, and U2's Adam Clayton, who used his Gibson RD Artist model during the *Achtung Baby* sessions in 1990 and 1991.

The model pictured here is a 1979 RD Artist with a maple body and Firebird-like cutaway that wasn't received warmly by guitarists—similar to the infamous Firebird X. Constructed with an ebony fretboard atop a 3-piece mahogany neck, the Artist models had a 24.75" scale length. For those wanting to venture into Fender territory, the RD Customs offered a 25.5" scale length. This RD Artist features two humbuckers, four control knobs, a 3-way pickup selector, Tune-o-matic bridge, and a TP-6 tailpiece Additionally, the Artist model was outfitted with 3-way switch for mode selection—neutral, bright, or front pickup expansion with back pickup compression. Ultimately, the RD Artist experiment died in 1982 with a total of just 2,600 units manufactured. As part of Gibson's 48th Guitar of the Week series in 2007, the RD Standard bass was reissued in silverburst, with a limited edition run of 400 instruments.

A special thanks to Jeff Sadler and Rock N Roll Vintage for the opportunity to feature this fine instrument and its story.



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Scott Walker Guitars

BY RICH OSWEILER

Northern California is a hotbed of custom lutherie—almost like a year-round guitar show. One could spend weeks in the greater Bay Area touring shops and talking to top-flight luthiers before having to plan the next trip to see even more. One such master craftsman is Scott Walker, a Santa Cruz-based luthier who cut his teeth in the business working for Santa Cruz Guitar Company alongside Richard Hoover. But SCGC produces acoustic instruments, so when Walker heard the siren call of electric guitar, he decided his work experience, education, and time spent crafting electrics during his off hours would allow him to start his own company. In 2005, he launched Scott Walker Guitars.

Walker fell in love with music at an early age and started experimenting with home-made pickups and guitar modifications shortly thereafter. Before long, he'd combined his interest in electronics and playing music with his passion for drawing and art. Shortly after high school, he knew he wanted to be a guitar builder and was off to the Roberto Venn School of Lutherie.

Walker handcarved over 1,000 necks while at the SCGC, including necks for such notable musicians as Tony Rice and Norman Blake. When asked what he took from his experience working almost solely on acoustic instruments, and how it would translate to starting an electric guitar company, Walker explained, "Just handling the different wood species, proportions, and combinations really opened my eyes and ears to the fact that it's how you manipulate the wood that's the biggest factor in the end tonal result—acoustic or electric. It may sound strange, but like anything else you do over and over, you develop this other sense. So when I pick up a piece of mahogany, rosewood, or maple, I can just kind of hear what it's going to sound like—and if it wants to be a guitar." It should be noted that Walker just completed his first batch of dreadnoughts, based on Norman Blake's old 12-fret, slope-shoulder Martin.

When questioned about trends in lutherie and what current one could have the biggest effect in the next 15-20 years, Walker responded, "Wood—sustainable, renewable woods will become more accepted and expected. But I think the industry has to decide on what those woods actually are." He doesn't believe that mahogany is mahogany is mahogany. "You take three different builders and give them the same billets, and you'll have three different sounding guitars. So over the next 15 years, we as an industry will have to decide on what guitar wood is going to be used and be heard on our grandkids' records."

The Phantom

With the Phantom, Scott Walker pays tribute to what was one of Steve Cripe's—the late, legendary builder—most elegant designs and last electrics played by Jerry Garcia. The model shown features an ebony top and back, along with a figured-maple core and padauk laminates. This guitar boasts custom single-coil Lollar pickups and a minimalist approach to the controls that still provide a unique variety of tonal options. There are two different preamps—an op-amp-style unity gain buffer, and an FET-style booster, both with On/Off switches—allowing a passive option, as well as a choice of either preamp, or both.

The Phoenix

In 2007, Scott Walker and Steve Kimock began discussing the ergonomics of a guitar that led to the current design of the Phoenix. It was also during this time that Kimock discussed pickups with Jason Lollar and how to go about designing the perfect single-coil that would be hum-canceling when both pickups are engaged. What they came up with was a wide, thin, blade-style single-coil shown on the Phoenix. Additionally, an extended, hidden tenon was added—on which the pickups are mounted directly—giving superb alignment, stability, increased resonance, and tone transfer. With a curly-mahogany body and neck, and a Brazilian rosewood fretboard, the Phoenix is outfitted with a solid copper pickguard for electronics shielding and to provide Walker a canvas for his patina and engraving skills.

THE PHANTOM

THE PHOENIX

The Fathom

The Fathom has the appearance of a guitar made of solid bronze that was buried at sea for over a hundred years—but it's constructed with alder, so it's still light and resonant. The Fathom's look is a finish and hardware upgrade that can be applied to any of Walker's models. This bronze patina finish is very durable, sealed for a comfortable feel, and low-maintenance enough to not require polishing. The road-worthy Fathom is offered with a wide variety of patina techniques for players wanting to bring out their own personality on their instrument.

THE FATHOM

California Bass

The long tenon design, select laminates, and multiple-bolt coupling on Walker's California Bass are designed to eliminate dead spots and promote resonance over all frequencies. Available with an alder or swamp-ash body, this bass features an Aguilar preamp, Hipshot bridge and tuners, and a maple neck capped with a rosewood fretboard. Though the pictured bass is loaded up with Lollars, the pickup configuration, as with all of Walker's instruments, is the customer's call.

CALIFORNIA BASS

The Walker Special

When ordering a Walker Special, Walker gives his customers a choice of body-style—solid, chambered, or chambered with a soundhole. Each option is discussed when choosing woods and talking about desired tone. With a standard mahogany neck and back, buyers choose the top wood along with their preference of humbuckers. The short-scale Walker Special is also adorned with a Jangletone II preamp, Walker tailpiece, TonePros bridge, and a bound ebony fretboard and headstock.

THE WALKER SPECIAL

The Santa Cruz

Walker says the Santa Cruz is considered to be one of his most versatile models. With a slightly longer body (25" scale length) than the Walker Special, it too features a standard mahogany neck and back, with the customer's choice of exotic top wood. For pickups, you can choose between Lollar Imperials or Low Winds, Fralin P-92s or Twangmasters, or Harmonic Design Z-90s. Like the Walker Special (above), the Santa Cruz also comes with an onboard Jangletone II preamp.

THE SANTA CRUZ

Pricing and Availability

Walker builds around 20 guitars a year. At press time he had 31 guitars on the production schedule, which equates to a wait time of approximately 12 months for a new instrument. All models come with a custom package that includes the choice of topwood, pickups, preamps, tuners, a Walker tailpiece and TonePros bridge, and more. Pricing for Walker's instruments ranges from $4350 to $6250, with a variety of optional upgrades available.

scottwalkerguitars.com

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PREMIER GEAR AWARDS 2011

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CHICKENFOOT'S JOE SATRIANI AND MICHAEL ANTHONY

We talk to Satch and Van Halen's former bass man/defining background vocalist about their super-diverse second album, *Chickenfoot III*.

TELE UPGRADE HOW-TO

Go-to Nashville luthier John Levan walks us step-by-step through the exciting process of replacing a Fender Classic Series '72 Telecaster Thinline's humbuckers with exceedingly rare original 1972 Wide Range humbuckers with copper/nickel/ferrite magnets.

VINCE GILL

The crooning Tele-wielder talks about his favorite guitars and amps, as well as the process of writing and recording his new album, *Guitar Slinger*.

CHET ATKINS AT COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME

NPR correspondent Craig Havighurst takes us inside the fascinating new exhibit dedicated to the original "Certified Guitar Player."

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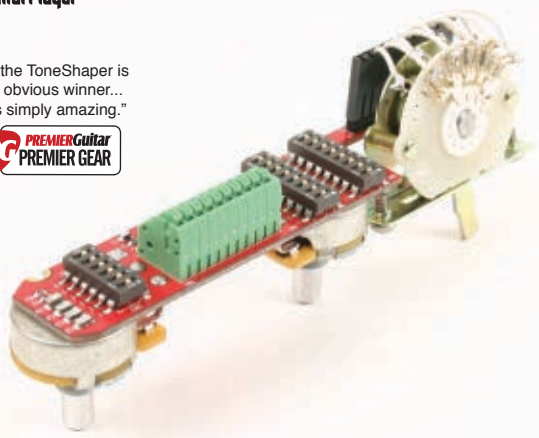

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Pictured: Baston Grand Concert Model
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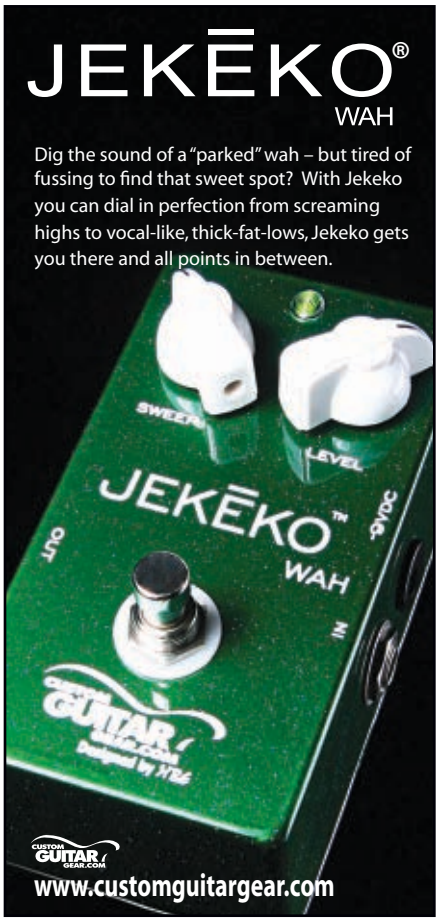

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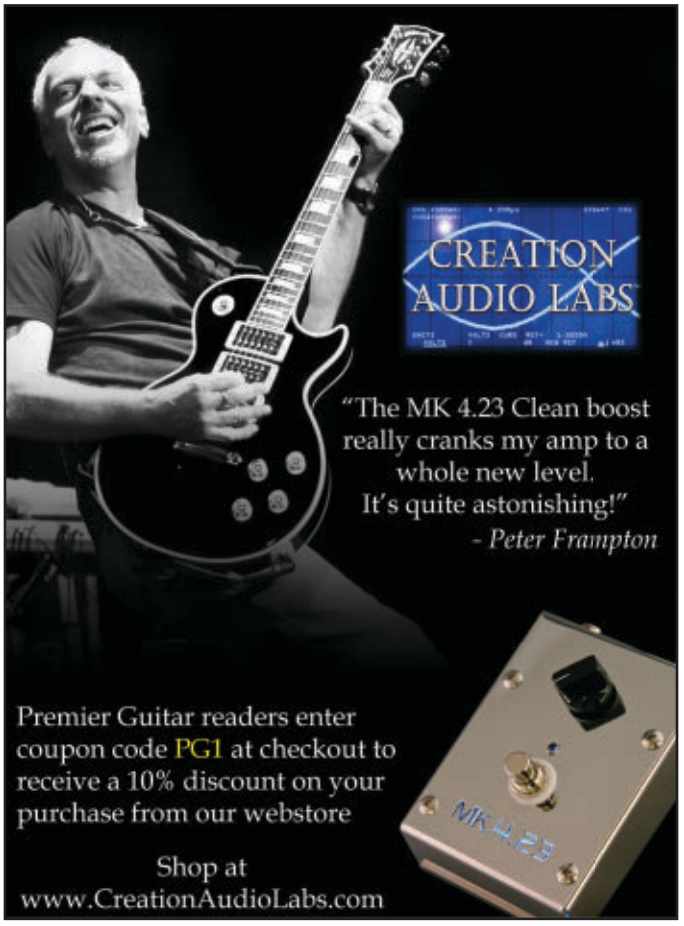
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PLAYERS PLAY BY JOHN BOHLINGER

For the past four years, I've worked with Randy Owen, lead singer for the band Alabama. Because Alabama has enjoyed 41 No. 1 songs and sold over 73 million records, there's a truckload of material for a set list, and shows tend to run long. Randy tries to keep the fans happy by playing everything—and sometimes even taking requests. One of the cool things about the Randy gig is that, even after a marathon concert of two to four hours, Randy will sit around on his bus playing guitar and singing. He cannot get enough. Randy, along with the rest of Alabama (Teddy Gentry and Jeff Cook), is an incredibly musical guy with a great work ethic.

Last week, I was lucky enough to play a private party with the band. As I took the stage, I looked out in the crowd and saw Steven Tyler, Brad Whitford, and Joey Kramer of Aerosmith. About 35 hit songs into the set, Randy invited them onstage and handed his Strat to Whitford, who promptly ripped into that unmistakable "Walk This Way" riff while Kramer smacked out that funky groove behind me. We all joined in. Tyler started singing and moving the way only he can, and the crowd went crazy.

After an extended jam, Kramer ended the song. By this time, our set had run too long, but Whitford began riffing a greasy blues thing in E. Tyler turned to Randy and asked, "What's he playing—is this one of your songs?" Randy replied, "I have no idea—he's *your* guitar player!" Tyler and Randy began improvising lyrics, then Randy started scat singing and Tyler did a harmonica solo that was pure genius.

When it finally ended, we were *way* past quitting time. Randy said goodnight to the crowd, and the Alabama and Aerosmith guys graciously hung around and posed for photos until a road manager said, "The helicopter is waiting. We really have to go."

I packed up my gear and set out in search of a post-show beer. I walked out front to the bar, where a little country band was playing "Tulsa Time." Whitford was up there with them, playing a goldtop Les Paul with P-90s. Apparently, on the way to the chopper, he heard a groove and jumped onstage for a quick jam. Tyler was standing at the foot of the stage, watching and listening while he bobbed his head to the music. Much like a post-show Randy Owen, these guys just could not stop.

I've found that the truly great musicians play music every chance they get. It's not about the money, the fame, or the approval (although I'm sure all of these added benefits are wonderful). They do it because they *need* to make music.

A few more examples: I was playing a TV-show wrap party at B.B. King's Blues Club in Nashville when former Bad English singer John Waite staggered onto the stage and slurred, "N a stong, I'm ... end a Rock ... owed." Taking an educated guess, I stomped on my overdrive and launched into the Zep's "Rock and Roll." When Waite heard the riff, he suddenly became the perfect British Rock God. He literally out-sang Robert Plant's version and looked great doing it. He finished with a slam of the mic stand then stumbled off into the night. The transformation was nearly superhuman, which made for an incredible performance.

Not long after, I was playing a tip gig with a throw-together band at Tootsies in Nashville when Chad Kroeger of Nickelback walked up to the stage and stuck a century note in our tip jar. I asked, "Want to sing?" He grabbed the mic and said, "Sure. Drums, give me a *ba da da, da, ba, da da, da* beat. Guitar, hit a low-E chord." Kroeger began singing CCR's "Born on the Bayou" and we fell into his swampy groove. Not only did Chad lead the band through his own uniquely bluesy arrangement, but he nailed that nearly impossible Fogerty vocal line. The monitors were terrible, the soundman was nonexistent, and the band was unfamiliar—and yet he managed to pull off a jaw-dropping performance.

I've found that the truly great musicians play music every chance they get.

Two months ago, I was musical director for a multi-act benefit where *American Idol* winner Kris Allen was slated to sing three of his songs with the band. After a long day of travel and soundcheck, Allen gave a great performance. After the event, those of us in the house band were contracted to do a two-hour dance set, while the stars were free to leave. I saw Allen hanging out by the side of the stage. I gave him a shout out and he immediately jumped onstage, grabbed an extra guitar, and led us through five or six classic country covers. Given his pop-star status, it was amazing to witness his encyclopedic knowledge of country music. Despite his long day and early flight out in the morning, it was remarkable that he chose to jam for free rather than get some much-needed sleep.

In early August, I was recording in Greece when the band I was working with was invited to a dinner party at Vangelis' house in Athens. (Vangelis is the Greek composer best known for his scores for *Chariots of Fire* and *Blade Runner*.) We arrived about 10 p.m. Appetizers lasted until 11. Dinner took us past midnight. Desert and coffee lasted until 1 a.m. By then, I was deliriously tired and eager to leave because I had a 7 a.m. international flight the next day. Then Vangelis invited us into his living room, which had two grand pianos, a few harps, a PA, some guitars, and a keyboard. He sat at the keyboard and said, "Come play." Somebody handed me a guitar, our keyboard player, Ty Bailey, sat at one of the grands, and we improvised for over an hour, moving seamlessly from one cinematic, trance-inducing melody to another. Vangelis was excited to play—like a little kid. I think he staged the lavish party just to get a few people to play with him.

Forgive the shameless name-droppery, but these firsthand experiences illustrate a point: The common denominator in phenomenal musicians is their absolute love of playing music. They are sensational because they do it all the time. It truly is about the music.

JOHN BOHLINGER *is a Nashville multi-instrumentalist best known for his work in television. He led the band for all six seasons of NBC's hit program* Nashville Star, *as well as the 2011, 2010, and 2009 CMT Music Awards and many specials for GAC, PBS, CMT, USA, and HDTV. Watch him perform on YouTube, and check out his new band the Tennessee Hot Damns on Facebook and iTunes.*

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A revamped Presentation and 900 Series, a new GS, double cutaway electrics and new colors refresh the 2011 line

The 2011 Taylor

With each year's guitar line we inscribe a fresh chapter in the story of Taylor's ongoing love affair with guitars. Like any great relationship, ours is built on a strong foundation – a driving passion for crafting inspiring instruments – and evolves each year as our design team explores new frontiers in acoustic and electric tone.

On the pages that follow we unfold a scenic road map for this year's Taylor line. Whether you're a longtime member of the Taylor family or newcomer, we hope you come away with a fresh appreciation for the wealth of Taylor guitar "personalities" that are available to you.

What's New for 2011

While our standard guitar line remains largely intact this year, we're pleased to unveil several new additions. For starters, we responded to customer requests for a more affordable GS model by adding an ovangkol/spruce 416ce to the line. We also gave the 900 Series a makeover, returning to our elegant appointment package from several years ago, which features our popular "Cindy" fretboard inlay, rosewood binding, and red purfling. Within our Signature Series, the Doyle Dykes Signature Model welcomes an attractively priced new sibling, the Doyle Deluxe, which features a maple laminate back and sides, a black finish, and a new headstock treatment. And our Presentation Series returns from a brief hiatus to showcase a beautiful redesign. Distinctive new features include vibrant cocobolo for the back, sides and backstrap, an ebony armrest and binding, green heart abalone purfling, and beautiful new fretboard and peghead inlays.

Meanwhile, our electric line breaks new ground with double cutaway models for the SolidBody Classic and Standard. We've also added new color options for the Standard, and we've removed the Custom from the dedicated line, although it will likely re-emerge throughout the year in special limited edition offerings.

Finding Your Fit

Finding a guitar that "fits" you as a player is ultimately a choice that's all yours. While there are no set rules to follow, we're happy to share some guidelines that can put you on a path to some pleasant discoveries. Our Guitar Guide begins with a walk through the acoustic "tone equation" that we talk about at our in-store Road Show events. It's the idea that the combination of a guitar's body shape and tonewoods creates a distinctive type of acoustic voice, and that the way your playing style matches up with that voice will determine your guitar tone. We'll break down our five acoustic body shapes into their fundamental sounds and then survey the ways that different tonewoods flavor a guitar's sound. We'll also touch upon ways to match playing styles with compatible guitar choices. By understanding what kind of player you are and what kind of sound you're after, you'll be able to hone in on the Taylor models that help you sound your best.

We also offer tips for getting great amplified tone using the Taylor Expression System® and our other ES-inspired acoustic pickups. From there, we'll run through each acoustic series, noting the woods and aesthetic details that distinguish each. Then it's on to the electric line, where we'll break down our pickups and other ordering options that allow you to customize a SolidBody. Along the way we'll also showcase the beautiful custom features of our Build to Order program, and highlight the standard model options available with our acoustics. And we'll share the philosophies that shape our ecomanagement and customer service efforts.

As always, our Guitar Guide is meant to enhance your Taylor experience. Wherever you are on your musical journey, we think there's a Taylor that will make an inspiring travel partner. For complete specifications on all Taylor models, visit taylorguitars.com.

Shapes

Matching up with the right Taylor body style will give you a solid foundation for great tone

An acoustic guitar's body design literally shapes the sound that comes out of it. Each of Taylor's five acoustic shapes was developed to have a distinctive tonal personality, yet all share fundamental character traits – notably clarity and tonal balance – that define the Taylor sound.

When considering different body styles, think about the role you want the guitar to play. Are you looking for a one-size-fits-all model to handle a range of playing styles, or do you have a specific application in mind? And don't overlook physical comfort. How do different body shapes feel against your body and in your hands? If you can, try playing different Taylor body styles that feature the same tonewood combination. This will help you discern the tonal distinctions of each shape. Once you find the right shape for your needs, you can have fun indulging the deeper tonal nuances that different woods bring to a guitar.

And remember, whichever body style you prefer, you can always rely on the signature playability and intonation of a Taylor neck.

Grand Concert (GC)

Body Length: 19 1/2"
Body Width: 15"
Body Depth: 4 3/8"

The small-body Grand Concert debuted in 1984 to meet the needs of a new wave of adventurous acoustic fingerstyle players. In contrast to the traditionally darker, boomier voices of bigger body styles like dreadnoughts and jumbos, the GC's compact size and tapered waist kept the overtones in check. It was also more comfortable to play while sitting down, and the guitar's slightly wider neck gave players more room for complex fingerings. The GC's smaller sonic footprint also fit cleanly in a mix with other instruments when tracking in the studio and with a band on stage, making it a useful tool for professional session and side players.

Our current generation of GC models continues to accommodate fingerstylists with finger-friendly traits like a shorter 24 7/8-inch scale length, which makes fretting easier and adds a slightly slinkier feel on the strings due to the lighter string tension. If you feel more comfortable with a small body or favor controlled overtones, a Grand Concert is a great option.

Grand Auditorium (GA)

Body Length: 20"
Body Width: 16"
Body Depth: 4 5/8"

Our most popular and versatile body shape, the mid-size Grand Auditorium arrived in 1994 bearing refined proportions that fell between a Dreadnought and Grand Concert. While the bigger Dreadnought was traditionally considered a flatpicker's guitar and the smaller GC catered to fingerstylists, the GA was designed to deliver on both fronts. The

shape produced an original acoustic voice that was big enough to handle medium-strength picking and strumming, yet with impressive balance across the tonal spectrum, especially in the midrange, producing clear, well-defined notes that suited both strumming and fingerstyle playing. The GA's overall presence tracks well with other instruments both in a studio mix and on stage, and singer-songwriters have embraced its utility both for composing and traveling with one guitar. Many people want a single guitar that can cover a variety of styles, which is why the GA continues to be our bestselling shape. If you want a great all-purpose guitar, the multi-dimensional GA won't let you down.

Grand Symphony (GS)

Body Length: 20"
Body Width: 16 1/4"
Body Depth: 4 5/8"

The Grand Symphony shape joined the line in 2006 and delivered Taylor's boldest, richest acoustic voice. Think of a Grand Auditorium with a turbo boost, thanks to expanded physical dimensions, including a slightly wider waist and a bigger lower bout. Strummers and pickers with a driving attack will love the fullness, volume and sustain, yet for such a robust voice, the GS is also clear and responsive to fast picking runs or a light fingerstyle touch, so if you're a dynamic player, this shape is a true contender. And the big voice doesn't come at the expense of balance. The piano-like bass, meaty midrange, and thick, shimmering highs blend seamlessly. If you like a lush, potent guitar tone that has the horsepower to compete with other acoustic cannons out there, the GS shape is a worthy choice.

Dreadnought (DN)

Body Length: 20"
Body Width: 16"
Body Depth: 4 5/8"

What began as a traditional, boxy guitar shape that Bob Taylor inherited has evolved over time to honor the dreadnought's enduring sonic heritage yet also refine the look and sound into a more modern package. The Taylor Dreadnought still boasts that powerful dreadnought tone that old school pickers expect, with deep lows and crisp highs, but with a voice that, like every Taylor, is more evenly balanced across the entire tonal spectrum. Perhaps more than any other shape, the Dreadnought remains linked with roots music like bluegrass and folk, in part because of its traditional role in defining those sounds. Pickers and strummers with an aggressive attack will love our Dreadnought's blend of power and articulation, which allows for clear lead lines and crisp, driving rhythms. Even new models have a rich resonance that sounds like an older guitar.

Jumbo (JM)

Body Length: 21"
Body Width: 17"
Body Depth: 4 5/8"

Another inherited body style that evolved in Bob Taylor's hands, the Jumbo is Taylor's biggest shape, and conjures a big, full sound without being bottom-heavy. While the Jumbo's voluptuous curves present a lot of soundboard realestate, the contoured waist helps tighten the midrange, controlling the overtones. This comes in handy with our 12-strings, with which the Jumbo shape is most closely associated. The full bass tones counterbalance the doubled treble strings, producing a rich, lush tone with lots of signature Taylor clarity and balance. Coupled with Taylor's thin-profile necks, low action, and accurate intonation, you won't have to work hard or retune a lot to get a great 12-string sound.

Woods

Tuning in to tonewoods will help you gauge a guitar's sonic nuances

The tonewoods selected to craft a Taylor guitar marry acoustic properties with visual appeal. Each type of wood is defined by unique physical traits, such as density and stiffness, which in turn impact the way a guitar resonates. Guitar enthusiasts love to dissect the tonal frequencies that contribute to a guitar's sonic identity, often comparing the relative levels of bass, midrange and treble, and noting other acoustic properties like projection, sustain, overtones and headroom. Some terms used to describe tone seem to draw from our other senses, like "bright," "dark," "crisp," "sparkling," "sweet," and even "meaty."

Woods work in concert with a guitar's body shape to "flavor" the shape's fundamental sound. The next time you're in a music store, try playing several guitars that have the same body style but different woods. It might help you tune in to some of those flavors, and to discover how each responds to your playing style.

The tonewood descriptions that follow are meant as a general reference to help you differentiate each acoustic series in the Taylor line. Keep in mind that there are many other subjective factors. Even with Taylor's consistency of sound, each set of wood ultimately is physically and tonally unique. Remember also that we each hear tone in a slightly different way, and that a guitar will respond differently to what each player is doing. But that's the beauty of woods and guitars. There are always new and exciting discoveries to be made, and the answer is always in your hands.

Tropical Mahogany

Models: 500 Series, Acoustic 5 Series, LKSM models

A popular guitar tonewood, mahogany claims its sonic identity largely in the midrange frequencies. Its "meaty" midrange character is the result of harmonic overtones that build up to create a wonderful acoustic "bloom" that's often described as "breathy." Paired with a cedar top on a 514ce, one of our most popular models, the tone conveys plenty of warmth and character, which many fingerstyle players and light to medium strummers will enjoy.

Indian Rosewood

Models: 700, 800, 900 Series, Acoustic 7, 8 Series, DMSM, JMSM, SCCSM, NS72ce, NS74ce; Laminate: 200 Series, NS24e, NS24ce

Rosewood's rich heritage as a preferred tonewood is due in part to its highly musical, full-spectrum tonal range. Boasting a deep low end and capable of a throaty growl, rosewood is also balanced by bright, crisp treble notes, with fewer midrange overtones than mahogany. It sounds great with players who have a heavier attack, especially if you use a pick. If you like a full low end and sizzling highs, you'll probably enjoy a rosewood guitar.

Big Leaf Maple

Models: 600 Series, Acoustic 6 Series, NS62ce, NS64ce, DDSM

Maple's tone is very focused and dominant on the fundamental. Its sound is often perceived as clean and "bright" because of its relative lack of overtones and its treble sparkle. The quicker note decay gives the notes a sense of definition that allow the sound to cut through a live band setting well, making maple guitars a favorite of stage and studio players. Flamed or "fiddleback" maple is quartersawn, which makes it slightly punchier than quilted maple, which is flatsawn and often yields a bit more sweetness and warmth.

Hawaiian Koa

Models: Koa Series, Acoustic Koa Series

Think of the midrange of mahogany blended with the top end of maple. As a fairly dense tropical hardwood, koa's tone tends to be relatively bright on a newer guitar, but the more it's played, the more the midrange expands to create a sweeter, more resonant voice. Koa's initial brightness can be softened by fingerstylists who play with the pads of their fingers.

Sapele

Models: 300 Series, Acoustic 3 Series, NS32ce, NS34ce; Laminate: 100 Series, Baby Taylor, TSBT, GS Mini

This highly sustainable African tonewood yields a consistent, balanced voice across the tonal spectrum, making it great for a full range of playing styles. It's a viable alternative to mahogany, with slightly fewer midrange overtones and a little more treble zest.

Ovangkol

Models: 400 Series, Acoustic 4 Series

An African relative of rosewood, ovangkol shares many of rosewood's tonal properties, including a broad spectrum of tonal frequencies, plus a slightly fuller midrange and a bright treble response that approaches that of maple. While it lacks the name recognition of other more traditional tonewoods, its tonal versatility gives it broad appeal that expands even further this year with the addition of an ovangkol GS to our 400 Series.

Walnut

Models: Build to Order

Like koa, walnut's density and stiffness yield bright treble notes, but with a more present midrange that splits the difference between rosewood and mahogany. Walnut typically produces a slightly deeper low end than koa, yielding a woodier character, at least initially. The bass tones will grow richer with time and extended playing.

Macassar ("Striped") Ebony

Models: Build to Order

This dense hardwood is typically clear and loud with considerable dynamic range. It has a strong bass and lower mids, clear highs, and a slightly scooped midrange like rosewood. Macassar likes to be played aggressively and, like koa, often takes a little while for the tone to "open up" and become richer. It can sound bright or dark, depending on the technique of the player.

Cocobolo

Models: Presentation Series, Build to Order

Mexican cocobolo is a dense, stiff tropical hardwood that produces a fairly bright overall tone emphasized by sparkling treble notes. Sonically, it's comparable to koa but resonates a little deeper on the low end, although not quite as deep as rosewood or ovangkol. Fast and responsive, cocobolo's note distinction gives it an articulate voice that responds well to a variety of playing styles, depending on the body shape.

Laminates

Models: 100, 200 Series, Baby Taylor, Big Baby, GS Mini, NS24ce, NS24e, TSBT, Doyle Deluxe

Offering guitars that feature a laminate back and sides allows us to produce these models more cost-effectively and pass the savings onto the customer. Our veneered construction features three layers of wood that are glued together, which makes for a strong and resilient guitar body that tends to travel well and in general hold up better to extremes of relative humidity. A laminate won't produce quite the complexity of tone that a solid wood guitar will, but all of our laminate models feature a solid wood soundboard to generate quality acoustic tone.

Soundboards

A guitar's top, or soundboard, is a vital part of a guitar's tonal equation. The top resonates together with the strings to generate a complex range of tones. Spruce is the king of guitar tops because it's relatively light yet strong, with a high degree of elasticity that helps translate the player's picking or strumming into clear acoustic tone. We use several different types of spruce, although Sitka is the most available.

Sitka Spruce

Models: Most acoustic/electric and acoustic models

Sitka generates a broad dynamic range and accommodates numerous playing styles.

Western Red Cedar

Models: 514ce, 516ce, 714ce, 716ce, Acoustic 7, NS72ce, NS74ce

Less dense than spruce, cedar's relative softness brings additional warmth to a guitar's tone, especially for players with a softer touch, like fingerstylists or light to moderate strummers and pickers. With a lighter touch, cedar is actually louder than spruce, but players with a strong attack are often better paired with spruce, as they might run overdrive cedar, creating a more distorted sound at higher volumes.

Engelmann Spruce

Models: 510ce, 512ce, 710ce, 712ce, NS62ce, NS64ce

Engelmann spruce tends to produce what's perceived as a slightly richer midrange than Sitka. It's often described as having a more mature sound associated with an older guitar that has been played in. Its availability is limited.

Adirondack Spruce

Models: Build to Order

Once commonly used for guitar tops but currently limited in availability, Adirondack spruce has a "springy" quality. Acoustically, it boasts a robust output and more dynamic range than Sitka, which allows it to be driven aggressively for greater volume without distortion. The midrange tones also tend to have a richer, sweeter quality. Even using it for the bracing on a Sitka or Engelmann top will enhance the overall tone.

Hardwood Tops

Models: Koa: K20ce, K22ce, K24ce, K26ce, K64ce, K65ce, K66ce, optional on Acoustic Koa models

Harder, denser woods like koa that are used on the back and sides of a guitar are sometimes used as tops. Their stiffness initially translates into a bright tone, but the more the guitar is played, the more the overtones emerge, for a fuller, richer sound. Other hardwoods that are available as top options through our Build to Order program include walnut and mahogany.

Top down: Indian rosewood, Macassar ebony (maple mini wedge), mahogany/cedar

The Player

Your playing technique is an essential part of matching up with the right model

While a guitar's body shape and woods influence its tone, ultimately, tone is largely in the hands of the player. The same guitar will probably sound a little different in every player's hands, which means that the nuances of your personal technique will help determine which body shape and woods match you best. Much like pairing the right wines with foods can elevate a meal to sublime heights, finding a guitar that complements your playing style will make your playing experience more enjoyable. Here are a few questions that should help you hone in on the right type of guitar.

Do you plan to strum, flatpick, fingerpick, or all of the above?

If you like to mix it up, you probably want a shape/wood pairing that supports versatility, like a GA. If you're predominantly an aggressive picker or strummer, a Dreadnought or GS will likely work best. If you're a beginner and aren't quite sure, think about the styles of music you'd like to play. Do you like rich-ringing open chords or do you plan to play more closed-position chords or single-note lead runs?

Do you have a heavier or lighter attack?

In other words, how much energy are you applying to the strings when you play? Do you drive the strings hard to generate volume and create a robust tone? If so, you want a guitar that's big enough to handle that energy and produce a full sound without getting distorted.

What will your playing application(s) be?

Will you be playing on your own or with other people? If you're playing with others, is it a pure acoustic environment in which you need enough volume to compete? Also, if you'll be playing with another Taylor acoustic, it will probably sound better if they're different models. A guitar with a different body style or wood combination will often create a more complex tone with richer harmonic structure.

If you'll be playing solo and singing, does a certain guitar tend to better complement the frequencies of your voice? For example, rosewood's scooped midrange might allow more room for your voice, which tends to occupy the same midrange frequencies. Will you be recording or performing with the guitar? Try to consider the environment in which you'll be playing.

Is your tone bright or dark?

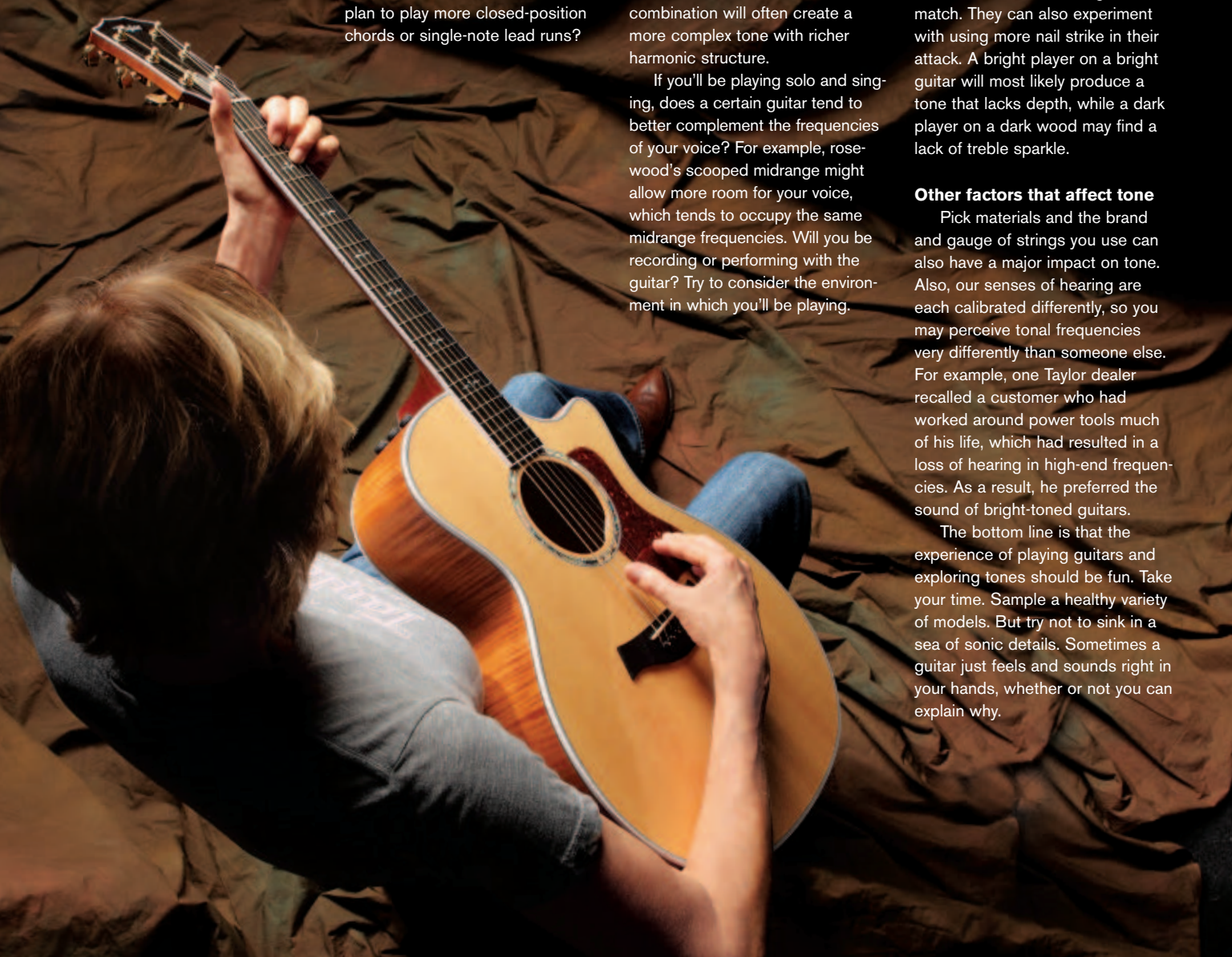
At Taylor Road Shows, we talk about a player's "bone tone," often described in terms of the sonic qualities of brightness (with more treble prominence) and darkness (more pronounced bass tones), just like wood tones are differentiated. Players with a heavier attack or who fret with a tight grip, or fingerpickers who use fingerpicks, their nails or acrylics, for example, often produce a brighter tone. This will sometimes dampen the midrange bloom and affect the degree of fullness and sustain. If so, it might help to try a wood that naturally has a warmer, darker sound. Fingerpickers can also try playing more with the pads of their fingers.

Conversely, fingerstyle players with darker hands might find brighter tonewoods like maple, koa or cocobolo to be a good match. They can also experiment with using more nail strike in their attack. A bright player on a bright guitar will most likely produce a tone that lacks depth, while a dark player on a dark wood may find a lack of treble sparkle.

Other factors that affect tone

Pick materials and the brand and gauge of strings you use can also have a major impact on tone. Also, our senses of hearing are each calibrated differently, so you may perceive tonal frequencies very differently than someone else. For example, one Taylor dealer recalled a customer who had worked around power tools much of his life, which had resulted in a loss of hearing in high-end frequencies. As a result, he preferred the sound of bright-toned guitars.

The bottom line is that the experience of playing guitars and exploring tones should be fun. Take your time. Sample a healthy variety of models. But try not to sink in a sea of sonic details. Sometimes a guitar just feels and sounds right in your hands, whether or not you can explain why.



Acoustic Electronics

The Taylor Expression System® blends rich acoustic tone with plug & play simplicity

People love the clear, full acoustic tone of their Taylors. Why should it be different when they plug in? That's why we spent several years developing our own onboard acoustic pickup and pre-amp, the Expression System (ES). After years of installing aftermarket pickups on our acoustic guitars and hearing the difference between true acoustic tone and the more artificial sound pickups typically produced, we felt compelled to explore ways to give players a more natural amplified tone.

Introduced in 2003, the ES was inspired by the fidelity of studio micro phones, which capture the authentic detail of an acoustic guitar for recording. An all-magnetic system, the ES actually works like a microphone to create a pure signal and a warm, natural sound. It also solves traditional pickup problems like feedback and a hot B string. For the first time, the tonal nuances of a guitar really came through.

continued next page

Expression System

Seamless Design for Better Performance

Developing the ES in-house allowed for seamless design integration with our guitars – the pickup, in essence, became part of the anatomy of the guitar. As a result, we were able to optimize the pickup and preamp for the Taylor voice. The nonintrusive way the ES components were incorporated into the guitar also preserved the aesthetic beauty of the instrument.

The current version of the ES features two magnetic sensors. A Dynamic Body Sensor® is strategically mounted to the underside of the soundboard to capture the nuances of the top movement, while a Dynamic String Sensor® is embedded near the neck pocket under the fretboard extension to register string and neck vibration. Together, the pickups reproduce all the acoustic clarity and articulation that define the Taylor sound. A pro-audio-grade discrete preamp cleanly boosts the signal without the noise that might otherwise distort or muddy the tone. When you plug in, you'll hear the same warm, musical voice you've grown to love when playing your Taylor unplugged. In fact, the sound quality is so good that many artists and recording engineers use the ES signal for studio recording.

Simple Tone Controls

Part of the beauty of the ES design is in the way it simplifies the tone-shaping process. Three soft-touch roller knobs are elegantly aligned in the upper bout of the guitar, allowing for easy adjustment of volume, bass, midrange and treble frequencies. Another feature that enhances gigging flexibility is a switch on the preamp board inside the soundhole that allows players to turn off the body sensor (see our ES tips on the following page). The easy-to-use controls allow you to adjust to fit the nature of the performance space.

The ES comes standard on acoustic/electric models from the 300 Series up and is optional on models in our acoustic line.

Other ES-inspired Pickups

The Expression System was just the beginning of our ongoing commitment to developing guitar electronics. We've since introduced other ES-inspired pickups for the Taylor line.

ES-T® Under-Saddle Transducer / 100 & 200 Series

The ES-T® is a single-source, under-saddle transducer with individual elements for each string. It has an onboard preamp and the same active controls found on the full ES. Featuring a custom-voiced EQ and dynamic response, the system is powered by a 9-volt battery, with a battery life LED power indicator (which is lit when the battery is being used). The pickup also has a Phase switch for feedback control, which is located on the preamp board inside the soundhole.

ES-N® / Nylon Series

The ES-N is similar to the ES-T, but the preamp design and tone controls were customized to complement the nylon-string voice. Our standard ES control knobs enable plenty of tone-shaping and preserve the natural design aesthetic.

ES-Go™ / GS Mini

The ES-Go is an after-market, passive magnetic soundhole pickup that was developed specifically for the GS Mini. Anyone can install it in minutes with just a screwdriver thanks to the pre-fitted connecting bracket inside the guitar. Pair it with the V-Cable™, which features a built-in volume control on the cord.

ES Installation and Retrofits

For Taylor owners who have an older Taylor with pre-ES electronics or a model without electronics, our Factory Service Center can install or retrofit the Expression System. A retrofit for "classic" Taylor necks (featuring a one-piece, pre-NT neck design) incorporates the same type of a neck/string sensor used on the standard ES, only the pickup housing is mounted in the soundhole. The Baby and Big Baby can be equipped with an active under-saddle transducer.

The K4 Equalizer

A secret weapon for any tone-conscious musician, the K4 is a preamp and equalizer that picks up where the ES leaves off, allowing you to precisely shape your guitar's tone by honing in on the notes or frequencies of your choice and then cutting or boosting them to taste. It's super versatile – perfect for studio or home recording and live performance. Features include a tuner output, phase reverse switch, headphone jack, and an effects loop, which allows you to use reverb, a stomp box, a volume pedal or other effects and maintain a balanced signal chain. Multiple, transformer-coupled balanced outputs give you routing flexibility, enabling you to drive an amp, PA or both. The K4 is also handy for enhancing the amplified sound of other types of acoustic/electric guitars. If you like to detail your tone, the K4 will always fit in your musical toolbox.

Here's how to get the most out of the Expression System

Tone Control

The ES has a volume, treble and bass control (in order from front to back). Each has a center detent position, which can be felt as a "bump" as you rotate the knob. This position represents "unity gain" on the volume control (an optimal setting in which input and output are the same level) and flat frequency response for the bass and treble controls. The detent positions are the ideal place to start when sound-checking your guitar. Setting the ES volume at unity gain and letting the sound person adjust accordingly will ensure that you have the maximum amount of tone control during a performance.

Tracking Battery Life

Since 2007, the ES has been powered by a 9-volt alkaline battery (we previously used two AA batteries). A fresh 9-volt will yield about 40 hours of plugged-in time. Remember that plugging a cable into your guitar turns the ES on and that the battery is active. When the battery gets weak, the signal will start to distort and quickly die out. Try to track your plugged-in time to avoid having a battery die during a performance. When installing a new battery, write the date on it with a permanent marker. The battery indicator light on the edge of the preamp lights up when a cable is plugged in. If the light is on, the battery is good. If you have an important gig and you're not sure how much life is left in the battery, play it safe and install a new one.

Balanced Versus Unbalanced Signals and Cable Use

Before the ES was introduced, most acoustic guitar pickups produced an unbalanced signal. As a result, in a pro sound situation an amplified guitar would be run through a direct box (also known as a DI box) to convert the signal to balanced, which minimizes noise, distortion and ground loops. Once the signal is balanced, you can run extremely long cables without any loss of power or tone. A balanced signal is preferable because it's cleaner and louder than an unbalanced signal. Think of the ES as already having a built-in direct box.

The type of cable you use will determine whether the ES produces a balanced or unbalanced signal. If you plug your Taylor straight into a PA or a snake box (a multicore cable that houses multiple microphone cables), use a TRS to XLR cable (available through TaylorWare in lengths of either 15 or 21 feet). You'll have a balanced signal with no direct box needed. If you plug into the ¼-inch input of an acoustic amplifier, or use effects pedals, use standard ¼-inch mono guitar cables.

Turning Off the Top Sensor Switch

A small switch located on the edge of the preamp, next to the battery indicator light inside the guitar, allows the body sensor to be turned off. (A refinement in the body sensor design in 2010 allowed us to shift from two sensors to one). It's positioned so you can reach it with your finger without removing the strings. The sensor is on when the switch is pushed towards the guitar's back. Sliding it toward the guitar's top turns it off. With the sensor turned off, the guitar will be less sensitive and have less presence. This can be useful for artists who play large venues and don't need all the fidelity the ES offers in that performance setting. Others have turned it off because they do percussive tapping on the top of the guitar directly over the sensor. The bottom line is that it gives you a slightly different amplified sound and greater performance flexibility.

Fused String Ground

Dirty power and faulty grounding can create any number of problems when you plug in. Those of us who play electric guitars are familiar with unwanted hum and noise that goes away when you touch the strings. This is no magic trick. The noise goes away because your body is now acting as the ground connection for your guitar's electrical connection. This puts you at risk of being shocked if significant voltage travels up the ground connection to your guitar.

On our acoustic/electrics (300 Series and higher), the 9-volt Expression System incorporates our patented Fused String Ground. This gives you the benefit of noise reduction when you touch the strings, and you're protected from electrical shock by the fuse. If a harmful level of voltage travels up to your guitar, the fuse for the string ground will blow, keeping you safe from being shocked. Your guitar's electronics will still function; the fuse simply disconnects your strings from the ground connection.

Our universal Fused String Ground can be retrofitted into any guitar.

Balanced Breakout Box

Let's say you plug your ES-equipped Taylor into a PA system without any effects boxes. Let's also say you want to run your guitar balanced because the sound is cleaner and louder that way, but you like to have a tuner in line at all times. We're not aware of any pedal-style tuners that use a balanced input and output, which is why we designed the Taylor Balanced Breakout Box. This little gadget allows you to run a balanced signal from your guitar into the box with a TRS to XLR cable and out of the box to your PA with a standard XLR mic cable (male to female). There's a ¼-inch output to run to your tuner, and a mute button to silence the signal going to the PA so you can tune quietly. By the way, a great side application of the Balanced Breakout Box is to mute vocal mics on a live stage when they're not in use.

THE 2011 TAYLOR LINE

ACOUSTIC / ELECTRIC

It was easy to find a prime setting in which to photograph our stage-ready acoustic/electric models. Ever since the arrival of Anthology (anthologysd.com) as one of downtown San Diego's premier listening rooms, the contemporary supper club has matched Taylor's refined aesthetics with a comparable environment designed for taking in top-level live performances. The club boasts a professionally tuned acoustic room, a state-of-the-art sound system, and open sight lines to the stage. The natural harmony between Taylor and the club has inspired an ongoing, collaborative relationship – we crafted the room's laser-etched sapele menu covers, and the above-stage VIP dining room, named in honor of Taylor, features a display of Taylor guitars and photos.

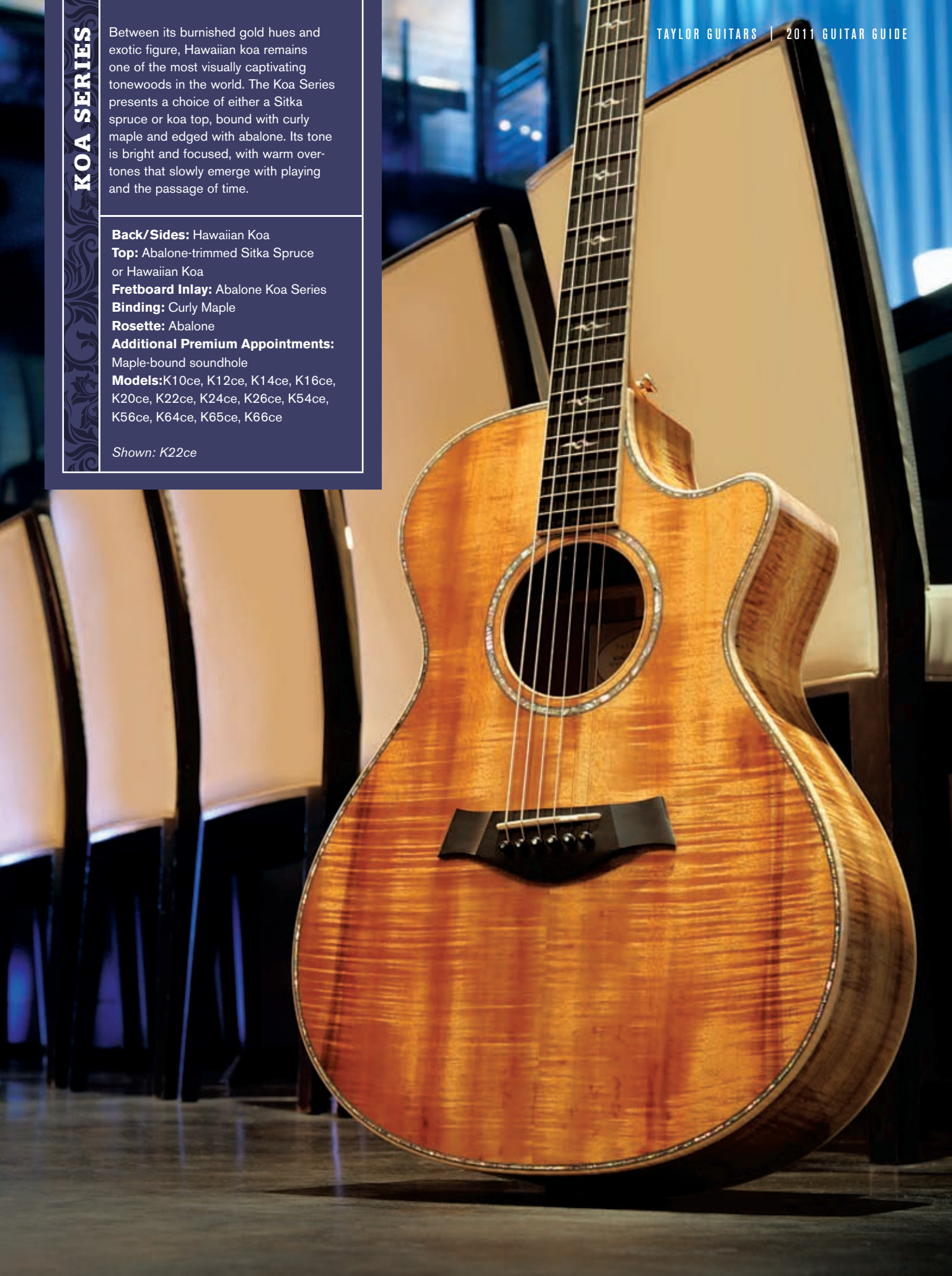
Owner and music aficionado Howard Berkson, shown with a newly designed Presentation Series guitar, graciously accommodated our photo team's daytime encampment over the course of a week, and we appreciate it. To view video footage of select models, use a smart phone QR code reader app on the Taylorcodes shown.

KOA SERIES

Between its burnished gold hues and exotic figure, Hawaiian koa remains one of the most visually captivating tonewoods in the world. The Koa Series presents a choice of either a Sitka spruce or koa top, bound with curly maple and edged with abalone. Its tone is bright and focused, with warm overtones that slowly emerge with playing and the passage of time.

Back/Sides: Hawaiian Koa
Top: Abalone-trimmed Sitka Spruce or Hawaiian Koa
Fretboard Inlay: Abalone Koa Series
Binding: Curly Maple
Rosette: Abalone
Additional Premium Appointments: Maple-bound soundhole
Models:K10ce, K12ce, K14ce, K16ce, K20ce, K22ce, K24ce, K26ce, K54ce, K56ce, K64ce, K65ce, K66ce

Shown: K22ce



900 SERIES

Representing the upper echelon of our rosewood models, the 900 Series returns to a classic look for 2011, featuring the popular "Cindy" inlay that was designed in tribute to Bob Taylor's wife. Other former 900 Series appointments are also reunited, including Indian rosewood binding, red purfling accents, and abalone top trim that also borders the fretboard extension. Among our three classes of rosewood guitars, the fine detailing of the 900 Series sets it apart with exceptional design sophistication.

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Abalone-trimmed Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: Abalone & Pearl "Cindy"
Binding: Rosewood w/ Red Purfling
Rosette: Abalone
Sunburst Options: Tobacco or Honey (top only)
Additional Premium Appointments: Abalone-edged top and fretboard extension, pehgead/bridge inlays, Gotoh tuners, bone nut/saddle
Models: 910ce, 912ce, 914ce, 916ce, 954ce

Shown: 914ce

800 SERIES

The flagship series of the Taylor acoustic/electric line traces back to Bob Taylor's first rosewood guitars, which helped establish a modern acoustic guitar sound. Contemporary appointments include curly maple binding and a pearl fretboard inlay, which together add a splash of refined style. For a more vintage look, opt for a tobacco sunburst top.

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: 800 Series Pearl
Binding: Curly Maple
Rosette: Abalone
Sunburst Options: Tobacco (top only)
Models: 810ce, 812ce, 814ce, 815ce, 816ce, 854ce, 855ce, 856ce

700 SERIES

Besides the clean, understated appointment scheme, our 700 Series rosewood guitars are set apart from other rosewood models by the choice of either an Engelmann spruce or cedar top. Engelmann features a creamier complexion, with a slightly more aged tone than Sitka, and accommodates fairly aggressive playing, while the softer cedar has a darker look and yields the kind of warmth that fingerstylists and other players with a light-to-medium touch will love.

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Engelmann Spruce (710ce, 712ce),
Western Red Cedar (714ce, 716ce)
Fretboard Inlay: Pearl Dots
Binding: Indian Rosewood
Rosette: Abalone
Sunburst Options: Tobacco (top only)
Models: 710ce, 712ce, 714ce, 716ce

Shown (L-R): Tobacco sunburst 814ce, 716ce

600 SERIES

Visually and sonically, our maple guitars command a striking stage presence. The bright, focused tone makes these guitars a favorite for performance, recording and any band setting, while a variety of color and sunburst options serve to enhance the natural figure in the maple sets we choose. Other signature touches include crisp white binding and our leaf inlay motif.

Back/Sides: Big Leaf Maple
Top: Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: Pearl "Leaf" Pattern
Binding: White
Rosette: Abalone
Colors/Bursts: Amber, Black, Blue, Blue Burst, Cherry Black Sunburst, Cherry Sunburst (or optional top only), Green, Honey Sunburst, Natural, Orange, Purple, Ruby Red, Ruby Red Burst, Tobacco Sunburst (or optional top only), Translucent Black
Models: 610ce, 612ce, 614ce, 615ce, 616ce, 654ce, 655ce, 656ce

Shown (clockwise from top): natural 615ce, red 614ce, honey sunburst 614ce, amber-body 612ce, tobacco sunburst 610ce

500 SERIES

Singer-songwriters are often drawn to our 500 Series because mahogany yields its inspiring tone easily, with a breathy midrange and high-end sweetness that will reward individual playing. Pair it with a top of either Engelmann spruce or cedar, which graces the 514ce, a quintessential Taylor model that blends warmth and articulation. For a super lush, boldly dynamic mahogany voice, try the 516ce.

Back/Sides: Tropical Mahogany
Top: Engelmann Spruce
(510ce, 512ce)
Western Red Cedar
(514ce, 516ce)
Fretboard Inlay: Pearl Dots
Binding: Indian Rosewood
Rosette: Abalone
Models: 510ce, 512ce, 514ce, 516ce

Shown: 514ce

400 SERIES

Our new 416ce brings the bold-voiced GS shape to our satin-finish 400 Series this year. Players continue to discover solid African ovangkol's responsive, rosewood-like tone, which pairs well with Sitka spruce and can accommodate a range of playing styles. White binding applies a crisp counterpoint against the gloss top and mottled brown hues of ovangkol, while the Expression System wires these guitars for high-fidelity amplified acoustic sound.

Back/Sides: Ovangkol
Top: Sitka Spruce
Finish: Satin with Gloss Top
Fretboard Inlay: Large Pearl Dots
Binding: White
Rosette: 3-Ring
Models: 410ce, 412ce, 414ce, 416ce, 454ce, 455ce

Shown: 416ce

300 SERIES

The richness of the solid-wood acoustic experience begins with our 300 Series. Environmentally sustainable African sapele shares mahogany's lively tonal response and, together with a gloss-finish Sitka spruce top, rings out with a brightness and clarity that give these guitars a definitive Taylor voice. Black binding flanks sapele's ribbon-like grain, with large pearl fretboard dots adding a traditional touch.

Back/Sides: Sapele
Top: Sitka Spruce
Finish: Satin with Gloss Top
Fretboard Inlay: Large Pearl Dots
Binding: Black
Rosette: 3-Ring
Models: 310ce, 312ce, 314ce, 315ce, 354ce, 355ce

Shown: 310ce

NYLON SERIES

The evocative flavor of nylon tone has become a vibrant element of many styles of contemporary music. Popular artists like Zac Brown and Jason Mraz have fully embraced the Taylor nylon voice for their music, and we've made the nylon playing experience inviting for steel-string players with signature Taylor playability, a 1 7/8-inch neck, a cutaway, and our proprietary ES-N® pickup for a natural amplified nylon sound. Choose from three different solid-wood pairings, or opt for our affordable rosewood laminate models.

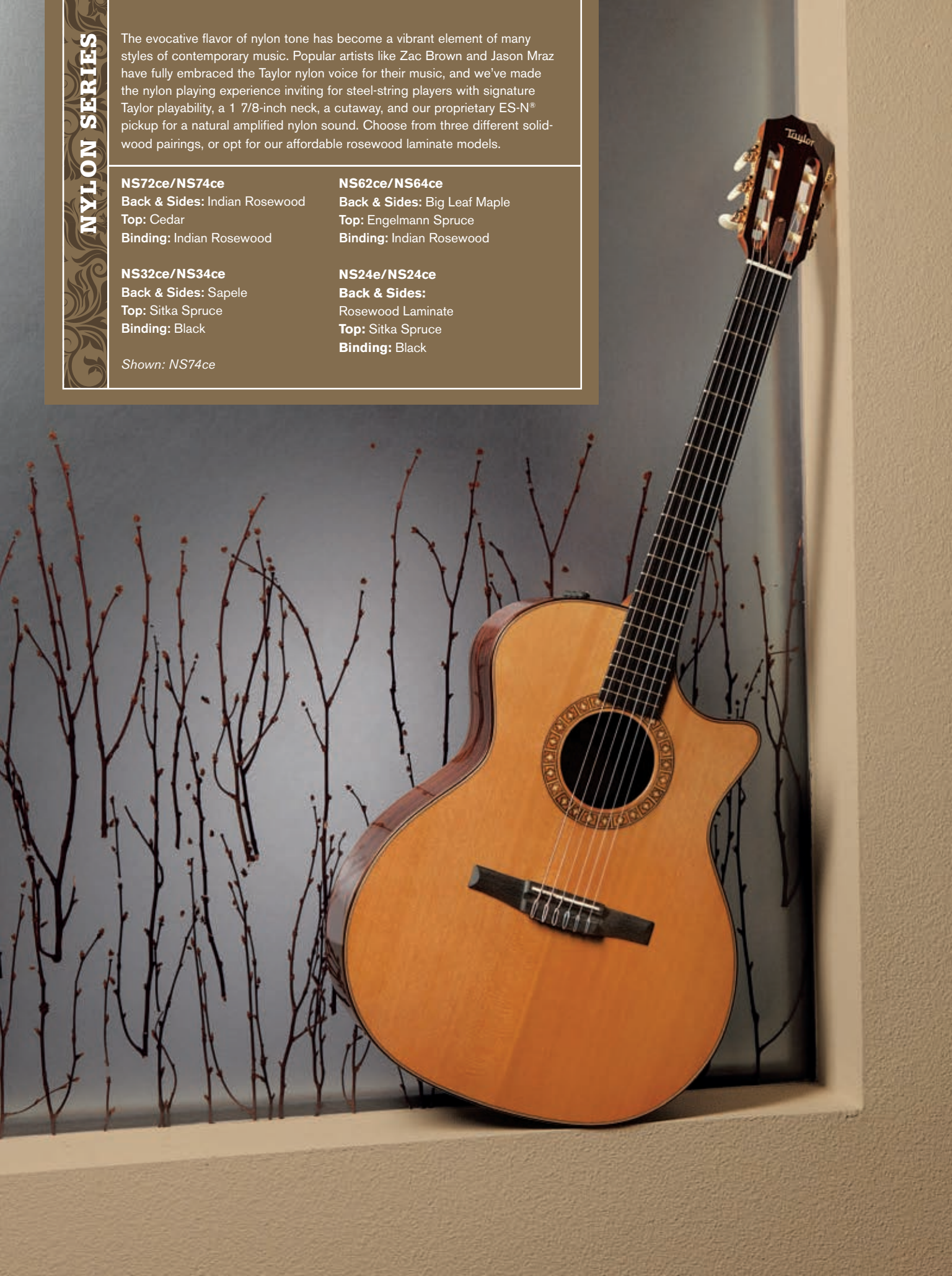
NS72ce/NS74ce
Back & Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Cedar
Binding: Indian Rosewood

NS32ce/NS34ce
Back & Sides: Sapele
Top: Sitka Spruce
Binding: Black

Shown: NS74ce

NS62ce/NS64ce
Back & Sides: Big Leaf Maple
Top: Engelmann Spruce
Binding: Indian Rosewood

NS24e/NS24ce
Back & Sides:
Rosewood Laminate
Top: Sitka Spruce
Binding: Black



SPECIALTY MODELS

We all sometimes crave a new sound to spark fresh inspiration, and each of our Specialty models delivers just that. Two GS Baritone models, an 8-String and a 6-String, are designed with a 27-inch scale length and tuned from B to B for a deep, rich sound with normal string tension. Both record incredibly well and blend wonderfully with other instruments. The Baritone 8-String's two octave strings expand the guitar's upper range without adding too much 12-string jangle, and its low-end seems ready-made for walking bass lines. Our 12-Fret is a rosewood/spruce Grand Concert that truly speaks for itself. The reorientation of the neck and bridge with the body help evoke the sweetness of a vintage guitar, and blend a rich depth of tone with sparkling clarity and articulation.

Shown (L-R): 12-Fret, Baritone 8-String

ACOUSTIC LINE

Taylor helped define the modern, performance-ready acoustic guitar with cutaways and onboard electronics. But we also love the clean, traditional aesthetic of a guitar without a cutaway or pickguard, and with understated appointments. It speaks to the pure essence of the guitar-playing experience. Our Acoustic line presents over 30 models, featuring four body shapes and a variety of wood pairings for a rich palette of tonal voices. A pickguard is available at no charge if you like, and for a touch of vintage style, burst options include a mahogany burst top on mahogany models, a tobacco sunburst top on rosewood models, and a full body tobacco or honey sunburst on our maple models. You can also opt for the Expression System pickup, whose unobtrusive controls blend naturally into the guitar to preserve the look and feel of a timeless classic.

Grand Symphony
Models: GS-K, GS8, GS8-12, GS7, GS6, GS6-12, GS5, GS5-12

Grand Auditorium
Models: GA-K, GA-K-12, GA8, GA8-12, GA7, GA6, GA6-12, GA5, GA4, GA4-12, GA3, GA3-12

Grand Concert
Models: GC-K, GC8, GC7, GC6, GC5, GC4, GC3

Dreadnought
Models: DN-K, DN8, DN5, DN4, DN3

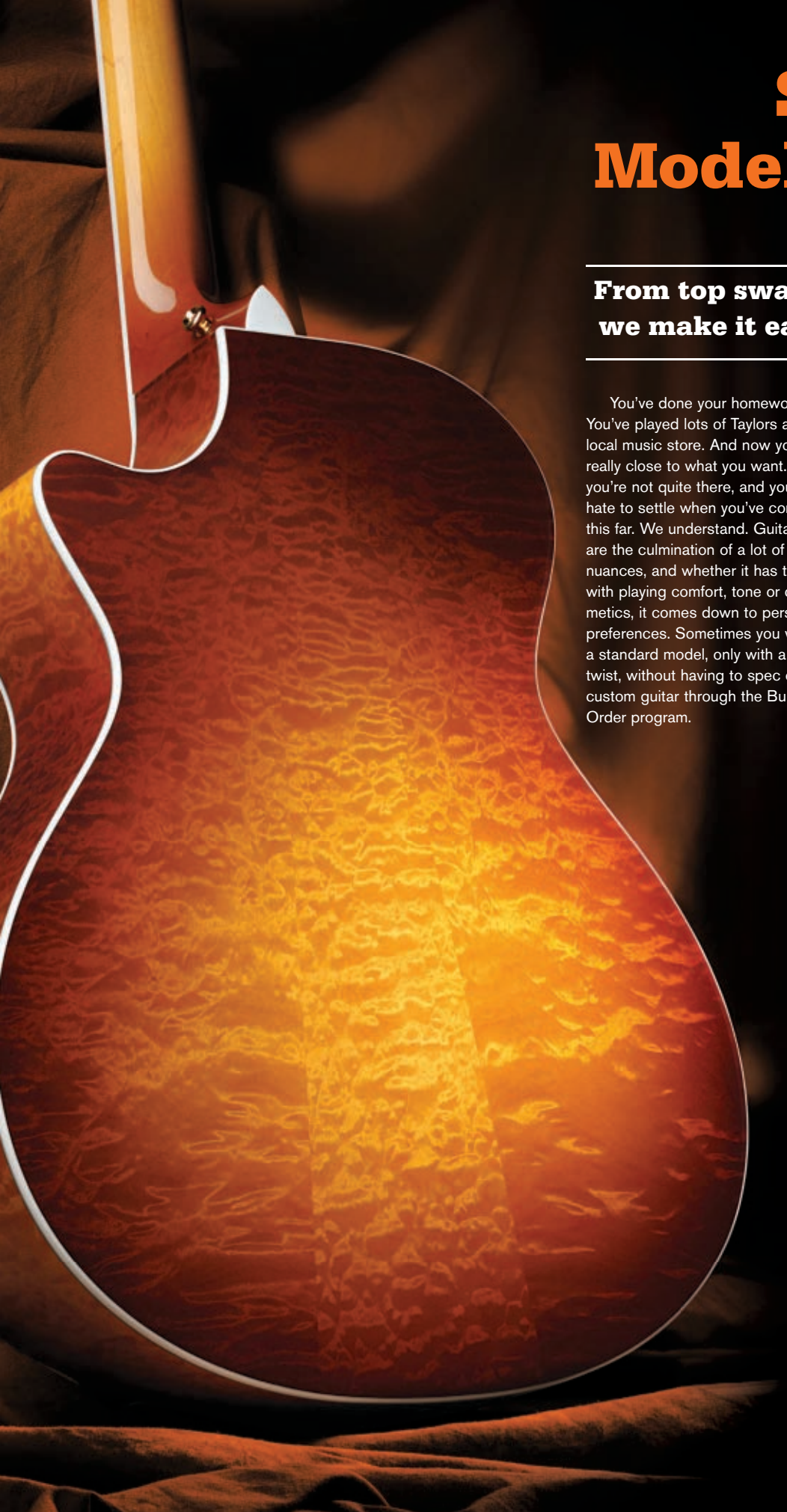
Shown (L-R): GA6, DN5, GS8, GC7

Taylor
Taylor
Taylor

BUILD TO ORDER

A custom guitar speaks to you in a way that no other guitar can. Through our Build to Order program, we'll not only build your dream guitar, we'll also help you dream. Start with a robust selection of menu options that cover steel-string and nylon-string guitars, along with the T5 and T3. To help you, we've brought many Taylor dealers out to our factory to immerse them in the BTO process, turning them into experts who can be a guiding resource. They'll have a comprehensive options menu and worksheet, since you'll be placing your order through them. We're also happy to answer any questions you might have about wood selections and other options. If you live in the U.S. or Canada and have specific questions, call us at 1-888-2TAYLOR, and we'll help you. For customers outside North America, contact the international Taylor distributor in your country. One of the best parts of the BTO program is that once you've ordered your guitar, you'll have it in your hands in about eight weeks. Not a bad turnaround for a dream to come true.

Shown (L-R): Left-handed GA with Macassar ebony back/sides; Walnut/spruce GS with tobacco sunburst top and armrest; 12-fret maple GC with koa mini wedge and binding



Standard Model Options

From top swaps to tuner upgrades, we make it easy to modify a model

You've done your homework. You've played lots of Taylors at your local music store. And now you're really close to what you want. But you're not quite there, and you'd hate to settle when you've come this far. We understand. Guitars are the culmination of a lot of nuances, and whether it has to do with playing comfort, tone or cosmetics, it comes down to personal preferences. Sometimes you want a standard model, only with a slight twist, without having to spec out a custom guitar through the Build to Order program.

That's why we offer standard model options. Maybe you want a short-scale 514ce, or an upgrade to Gotoh tuners and a bone nut and saddle, or a sunburst top. Or maybe you're a Taylor dealer and you want to offer your customers something unique. We can make it happen without a lot of hassle.

Some standard model options start with Taylor's Acoustic 3/300 Series, while others begin with the Acoustic 5/500 Series. Options may also vary between the Acoustic/Electric and Acoustic lines, and within a specific series. Prices also vary by option. We've put together a list of available options; for pricing, talk to your local Taylor dealer, since they'll need to place the order with us. And remember that these options are available for a new guitar being ordered, and not an existing guitar. For a deeper menu of custom guitar options, please refer to our Build to Order program.

612ce with Honey sunburst and 3-piece back options

Acoustic/Electric Line

300 Series and Up
- Alternative nut widths (1 11/16 or 1 7/8 inches)
- Switching to or from a short-scale neck
- Pickguard options (black, clear, tortoise, none)
- Lefty or lefty strung righty
- No strap pin
- Abalone dot bridge pins
- ES-T®
- No electronics

500 Series and Up
- Bone nut/saddle upgrade
- Sitka, Engelmann or cedar top substitution
- 3-piece back
- Florentine cutaway
- Tobacco/Honey sunburst top
- Tuners: Taylor Gold or Chrome
- Gotoh 510 Antique Gold w/ black plastic buttons
- Gotoh 510 Antique Gold

Series Specific Options

600 Series
- Satin neck finish

Choose between different grades of maple quilt or flame:
- A Flame
- A Quilt
- AA Flame
- AA Quilt

Color/Burst Options (no charge):
- Amber
- Black
- Blue
- Blue Burst
- Cherry Black Sunburst
- Cherry Sunburst
- Green
- Honey Sunburst
- Natural
- Orange
- Purple
- Ruby Red
- Ruby Red Burst
- Tobacco Sunburst
- Translucent Black

900 Series

Tuner Options:
- Gotoh 510 Antique Gold w/ black plastic buttons

Koa Series
- AA koa top
- AA koa back/sides
- Honey or tobacco sunburst top (Sitka tops only)
- Shaded edgeburst, entire guitar (koa-top models)
- Shaded edgeburst, top only

Acoustic Line

3 Series and Up
- Alternative nut widths of 1 11/16 or 1 7/8 inches
- Switching to or from a short-scale neck
- Pickguard options (black, clear, tortoise, none)
- Lefty or lefty strung righty
- No strap pin
- Abalone dot bridge pins
- Taylor Gold tuners
- ES-T
- ES®

5 Series and Up
- Bone nut/saddle upgrade
- Sitka, Engelmann or cedar top substitution
- 3-piece back
- Tobacco/Honey sunburst top
- Tuners: Taylor Gold or Chrome
- Gotoh 510 Antique Gold w/ black plastic buttons
- Gotoh 510 Antique Gold

Series Specific Options

5 Series
- Mahogany top
- Mahogany edgeburst (top only)

6 Series

Choose between different grades of maple quilt or flame:
- A Flame
- A Quilt
- AA Flame
- AA Quilt

Color/Burst Options:
- Amber
- Natural
- Honey Sunburst, entire guitar
- Honey Sunburst, top only
- Tobacco Sunburst, entire guitar
- Tobacco Sunburst, top only

8 Series
- Engelmann top substitution only

Acoustic Koa Series
- Koa top
- Upgrade to AA koa top
- Upgrade to AA koa back/sides
- Shaded edgeburst, entire guitar (koa-top models)
- Shaded edgeburst, top only

K24ce with Florentine cutaway option

510ce with Honey sunburst top

SIGNATURE MODELS

Each Taylor signature artist has cultivated an original musical voice that resonates with the world. What they all share is a love for their Taylors, which have helped inspire and convey their music. Our Signature models reference the standard Taylor models they've played over the years, adding a design twist that uniquely captures a piece of their artistry. We proudly recognize their passion and songcraft through our Signature models.

JMSM: Jason Mraz
Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Western Red Cedar

SCCSM: Steven Curtis Chapman
Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Western Red Cedar

DMSM: Dave Matthews
Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Sitka Spruce

TSBT: Taylor Swift
Back/Sides: Sapele Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce

DDSM: Doyle Dykes
Back/Sides: Big Leaf Maple
Top: Sitka Spruce

LKSM, LKSM-6: Leo Kottke
Back/Sides: Tropical Mahogany
Top: Sitka Spruce

Shown (L-R): JMSM, SCCSM, DMSM

DOYLE DELUXE

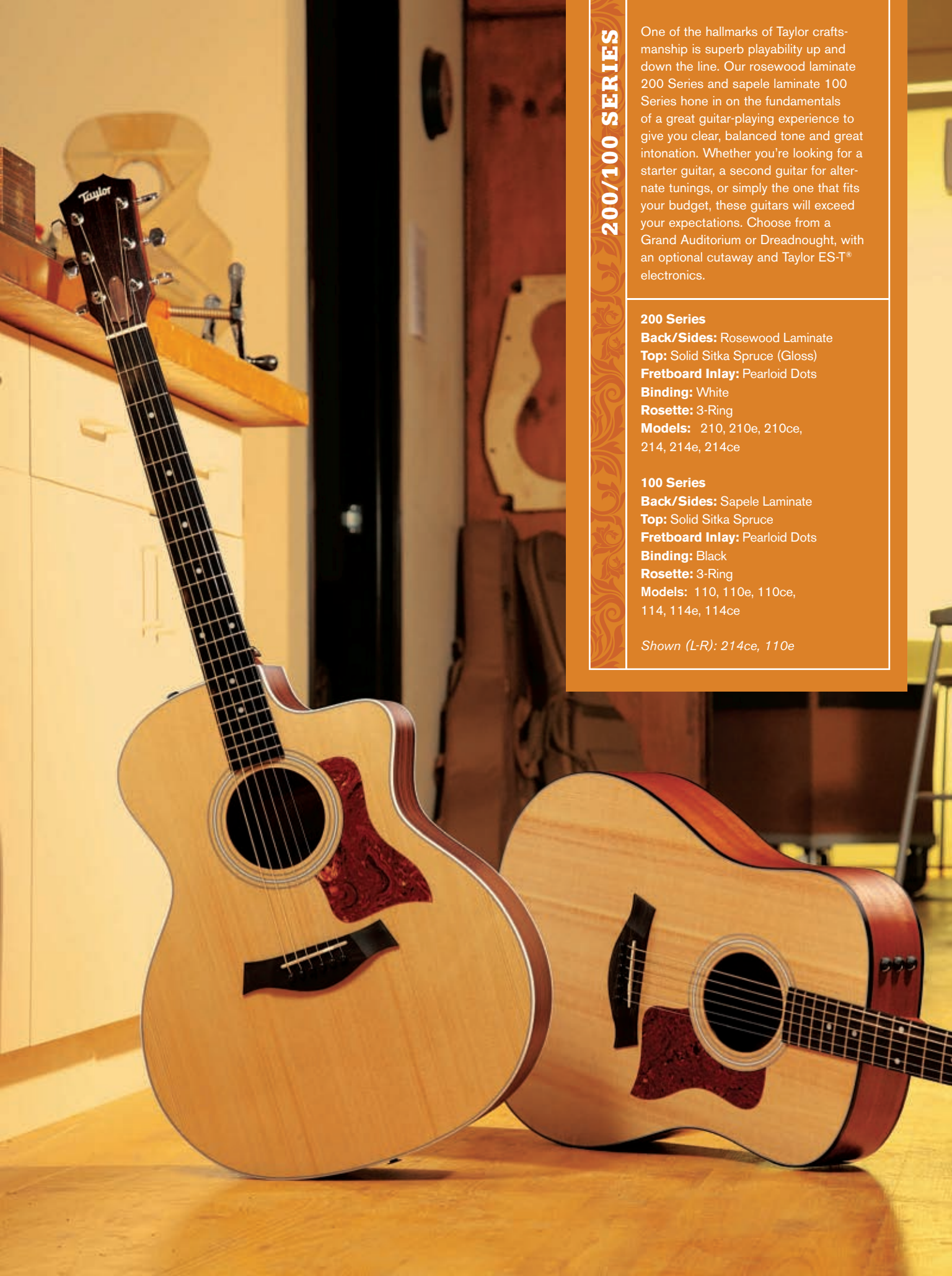
Taylor signature artist Doyle Dykes has long favored maple Grand Auditorium acoustic models. A decade after the introduction of his DDSM model, we're pleased to unveil a new namesake guitar, the Doyle Deluxe (DDX), a maple laminate GA with a solid Sitka spruce top. The goal was to bring a more affordable signature-style guitar to Doyle-inspired players while still delivering a high level of performance. Offered in black with a gloss finish, the DDX features Doyle's Chet Atkins-style fretboard inlays, a stylized signature treatment emblazoned along the headstock, a 25-1/2-inch scale length, and a 1-11/16-inch neck. The guitar comes performance-ready with Taylor's under-saddle ES-T® pickup.

Back/Sides: Maple Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: Pearl DDSM
Binding: White
Rosette: Faux Pearl Fishbone

GS MINI™

Whether you're on the beach or on the couch, the GS Mini is a bundle of musical fun. Customers keep telling us we nailed it with this guitar, and as humbly as we can say it, we can't help but agree. Our modern-day parlor guitar is designed to be compact enough to keep up with your life, whether you're out and about or just kicking back at home. Sporting a rich, full voice that belies its scaled-down size, the Mini might just become your new favorite guitar. And with the easy-to-add ES-Go™ pickup and Taylor V-Cable™, you'll have a viable performance tool, too.

Size/Shape: Scaled-down GS (23 1/2-inch scale length)
Back/Sides: Sapele Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: Pearloid Dots
Rosette: 3-Ring
Purfling: Black/White/Black



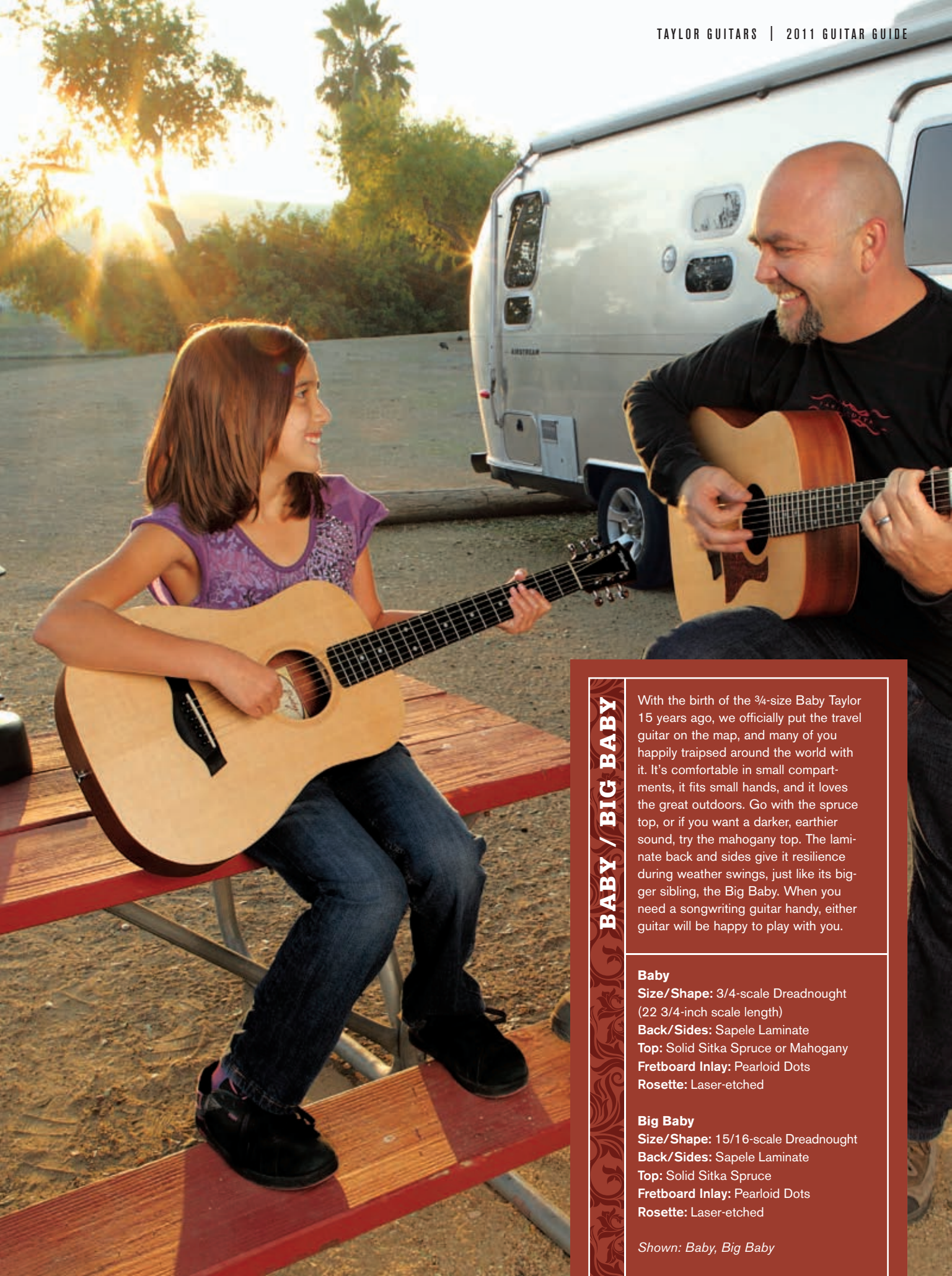
200/100 SERIES

One of the hallmarks of Taylor craftsmanship is superb playability up and down the line. Our rosewood laminate 200 Series and sapele laminate 100 Series hone in on the fundamentals of a great guitar-playing experience to give you clear, balanced tone and great intonation. Whether you're looking for a starter guitar, a second guitar for alternate tunings, or simply the one that fits your budget, these guitars will exceed your expectations. Choose from a Grand Auditorium or Dreadnought, with an optional cutaway and Taylor ES-T® electronics.

200 Series
Back/Sides: Rosewood Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce (Gloss)
Fretboard Inlay: Pearloid Dots
Binding: White
Rosette: 3-Ring
Models: 210, 210e, 210ce, 214, 214e, 214ce

100 Series
Back/Sides: Sapele Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: Pearloid Dots
Binding: Black
Rosette: 3-Ring
Models: 110, 110e, 110ce, 114, 114e, 114ce

Shown (L-R): 214ce, 110e



BABY / BIG BABY

With the birth of the ¾-size Baby Taylor 15 years ago, we officially put the travel guitar on the map, and many of you happily traipsed around the world with it. It's comfortable in small compartments, it fits small hands, and it loves the great outdoors. Go with the spruce top, or if you want a darker, earthier sound, try the mahogany top. The laminate back and sides give it resilience during weather swings, just like its bigger sibling, the Big Baby. When you need a songwriting guitar handy, either guitar will be happy to play with you.

Baby
Size/Shape: 3/4-scale Dreadnought (22 3/4-inch scale length)
Back/Sides: Sapele Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce or Mahogany
Fretboard Inlay: Pearloid Dots
Rosette: Laser-etched

Big Baby
Size/Shape: 15/16-scale Dreadnought
Back/Sides: Sapele Laminate
Top: Solid Sitka Spruce
Fretboard Inlay: Pearloid Dots
Rosette: Laser-etched

Shown: Baby, Big Baby

SOLIDBODY

More and more players are discovering what makes playing the Taylor SolidBody a fun and inspiring electric guitar experience. Designed completely from the ground up, the SolidBody boasts innovative Taylor touches like proprietary pickups, an ergonomic bridge design, and an array of flexible options that allow you to customize a model for the tones and look you crave. For 2011, we add a double-cutaway Standard and Classic, and the Standard is now available in a variety of colors that vividly highlight the figured maple tops. We've also added a new Parchment color option to our pickguards.

Standard
Body: Chambered Mahogany/ Quilted Maple Top
Neck: Mahogany (Gloss)
Single Cutaway: Venetian
Fretboard: Ebony/12"
Models: SB1-S (Single Cutaway), SB1-SP (Single Cutaway/Pickguard), SB2-S (Double Cutaway), SB2-SP (Double Cutaway/Pickguard)

Classic
Body: Solid Swamp Ash
Neck: Maple (Satin)
Single Cutaway: Florentine
Fretboard: Rosewood/12"
Models: SB1-X (Single Cutaway), SB2-X (Double Cutaway)

Shown (L-R): SB2-S, SB2-X, SB1-X w/ tremolo, SB1-S

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SolidBody Classic Colors

Choose from an array of vibrant body colors, each with a gloss finish, except for the satin-finish Natural. Then accent it with one of five pickguard colors.

Trans White

Titanium Pearl

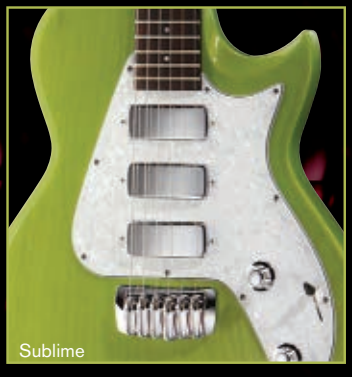
Lava Red

Jewelescent Orange

Purple Flake

Blue Metallic

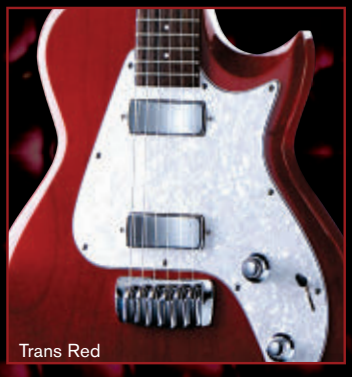
Viper Blue

Sage Green

Sublime

Magenta Pearl

Tobacco Sunburst

Natural

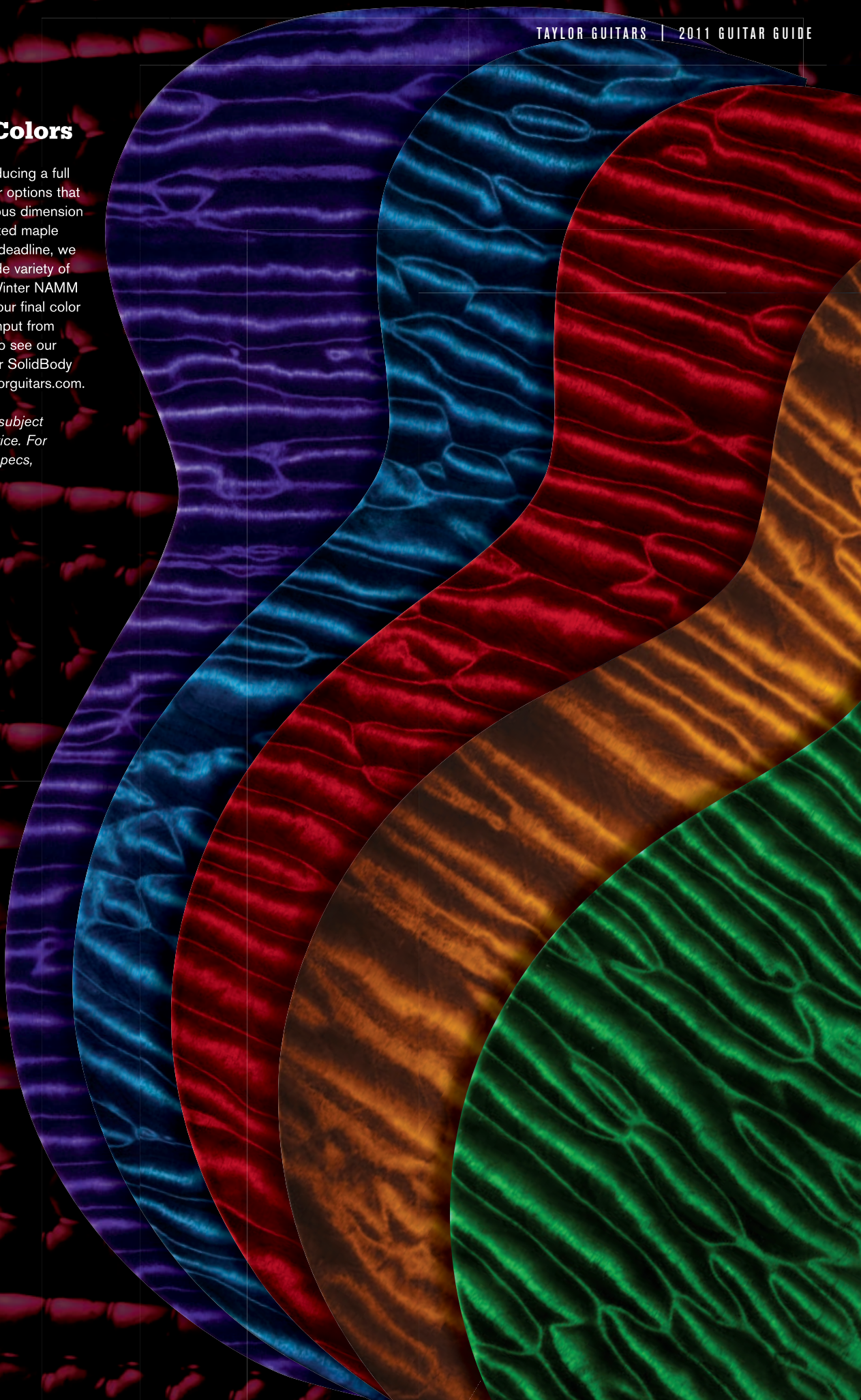

Trans Red

Black

SolidBody Standard Colors

For 2011, we're introducing a full spectrum of new color options that promise to add luminous dimension to the Standard's quilted maple tops. As of our press deadline, we planned to bring a wide variety of color options to the Winter NAMM show and then make our final color selections based on input from dealers and players. To see our final selection, visit our SolidBody Standard page at taylorguitars.com.

All specifications are subject to change without notice. For complete up-to-date specs, visit taylorguitars.com.



Build Your SolidBody

Explore the different custom options offered with the SolidBody using our online SolidBody Configurator at taylorguitars.com. The program allows you to select from all available options and build a virtual model. Feel free to experiment with different color, pickup and pickguard combinations. The Configurator gives you the option of downloading a picture of your guitar with your chosen specs. You can also e-mail them, print them, and be directed to one of Taylor's premier electric dealerships to place an order.

Choose Your Cutaway
Single or double.

Choose Your Pickup Configuration
A wide variety of single coil and humbucker options are available.

Choose Your Pickguard
Five color options are offered. For the Standard, you can also choose to have certain pickups direct-mounted without a pickguard.

Choose Your Body
Classic or Standard.

Choose Your Color
The Classic and Standard each have a separate palette of color options.

Choose Your Bridge
Stoptail or tremolo.

Pickup Configurations & Loaded Pickguards

An assortment of different pickup configurations gives you the flexibility to customize the fundamental tonal palette of your SolidBody. Our proprietary pickup designs include mini and full-size humbuckers (available in either high-definition or high-gain versions), vintage alnico humbuckers, and silent single coils. Not only can you choose your preferred pickup configuration, but you can also easily swap out your pickups with our solderless, "plug & play" loaded pickguards, allowing you to change the tonal personality of your SolidBody any time you like, in a matter of minutes.

2 Mini Humbuckers (HD or HG)
Mini humbuckers take up less sonic space than full-size humbuckers, making them a great choice for a band with multiple instruments. They have plenty of grind and punch without getting in the way of the mix. On stage, they have a little more cut and presence.

2 Full-size Humbuckers (HD or HG)
Full-size humbuckers have a heavier, dirtier tone than the minis for more of a rock edge. For years, players have relied on this combination to deliver the warm, sweet sound of the neck pickup and the bite of the bridge. The HG version is full of presence and is engineered to hit the front of the amp harder than the HD for a heavier, crunchy tone.

2 Full-size Vintage Alnico Humbuckers
The vintage alnicos are our modern version of a traditional PAF-style covered pickup. They feature a fat, round sound with a warm bottom end. Traditionally, guitars with two humbuckers have a 3-way switch. Our 5-way switching system adds both a parallel and series option for a broader tone palette.

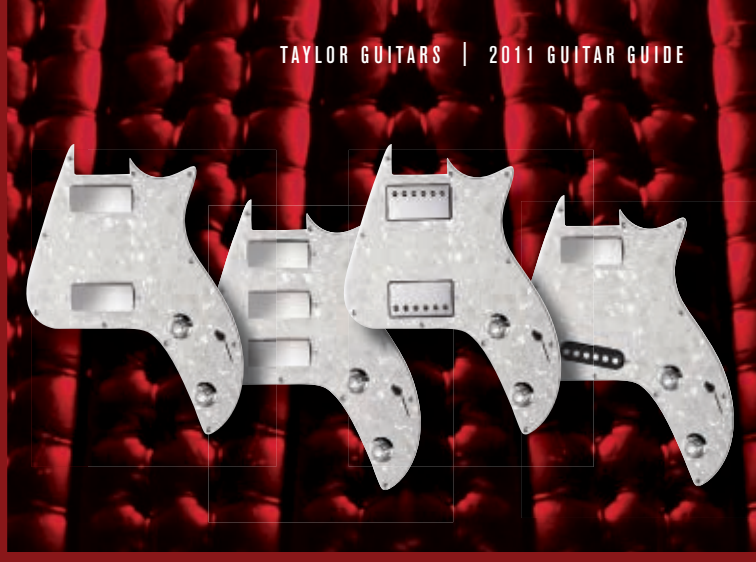
3 Single Coils
Another classic electric sound. "Little Wing," "Sultans of Swing," and "Another Brick in the Wall" are examples of single coil gold. Our silent single coils capture all the character of the single coil sound without the buzz and other sonic noise. The bridge pickup sounds great overdriven, yet has lots of sparkle and clarity when played clean. Our switching allows each pickup to be selected individually and also provides two combined pickup positions.

1 Full-size HG Humbucker
Some players just want to plug in, turn up, and rock out. If you like to ride the volume knob for more nuance, turning down the volume controls a little and hitting the amp in different ways will yield all kinds of colors and flavors at different levels. Pulling up the volume pot will split the coil.

2 Single Coils/1 HG Humbucker
Born out of the guitar player culture of swapping pickups, this combo is a popular and versatile setup. If you like to quickly switch between the slam of a humbucker and the wisp of a single coil, the "single single hum" configuration will get it done. Perfect for a player who wants access to multiple tones with one guitar.

1 HD Mini Humbucker/1 Single Coil
This setup throws a nod to Keith Richards and other great blues players like Albert Collins. A 3-way switch allows you to toggle between the modern sound of our high definition mini and the spank of our noiseless bridge single coil. Great for cutting, groovy, rhythmic chording.

3 HD Mini Humbuckers (HD or HG)
The three-mini setup is reminiscent of the '60s Firebird 7 but with Taylor's own sonic imprint. Positions 1 and 5 (Neck and Bridge) deliver a smooth and driving front edge, with great distortion and clean sounds available at the flick of a switch. Both positions drive the front end of an amp really well. Positions 2 and 4 capture a thick single coil vibe, and make great choices for blues rhythm or lead. The real gem of this configuration is Position 3, the middle pickup alone. It sparkles and drives at the same time; it's really transparent and thick. With a trem, this setup suits any style or tonal flavor.



L-R: 2 Mini Humbuckers (HD or HG), 3 Mini Humbuckers (HD or HG), 2 Full-size Vintage Alnico Humbuckers, 1 Mini Humbucker (HD) & 1 Single Coil

L-R: 2 Full-size Humbuckers (HD or HG), 3 Single Coils, 2 Single Coils & 1 Full-size Humbucker (HG), 1 Full-size Humbucker (HG)

L-R: Pickguard colors - Parchment, Black Pearloid, White Pearloid, Black, Tortoise

T3

Evolving from both the T5 and SolidBody, the T3 updates the classic semi-hollowbody sound, driving it across inspiring sonic terrain, from crunchy vintage rock to warm, woody jazz. Signature Taylor design touches include a coil-splitting application that allows you to turn the humbuckers into single coils, and a push/pull tone knob that activates two different levels of tone-shaping. A pitch-perfect metal roller-style bridge maintains tuning stability and includes two tailpiece options: a stop tailpiece or an authentic Bigsby vibrato for a neo-vintage look. Awarded Product of the Year by music dealers in *The Music & Sound Retailer* in 2010, the T3 elevates the feel, sound and performance of a semi-hollowbody electric.

Body: Sapele
Top: Quilted Maple
Color/Burst Options: Natural, Ruby Red Burst, Black, Trans Orange; Tobacco or Honey Sunburst

T5

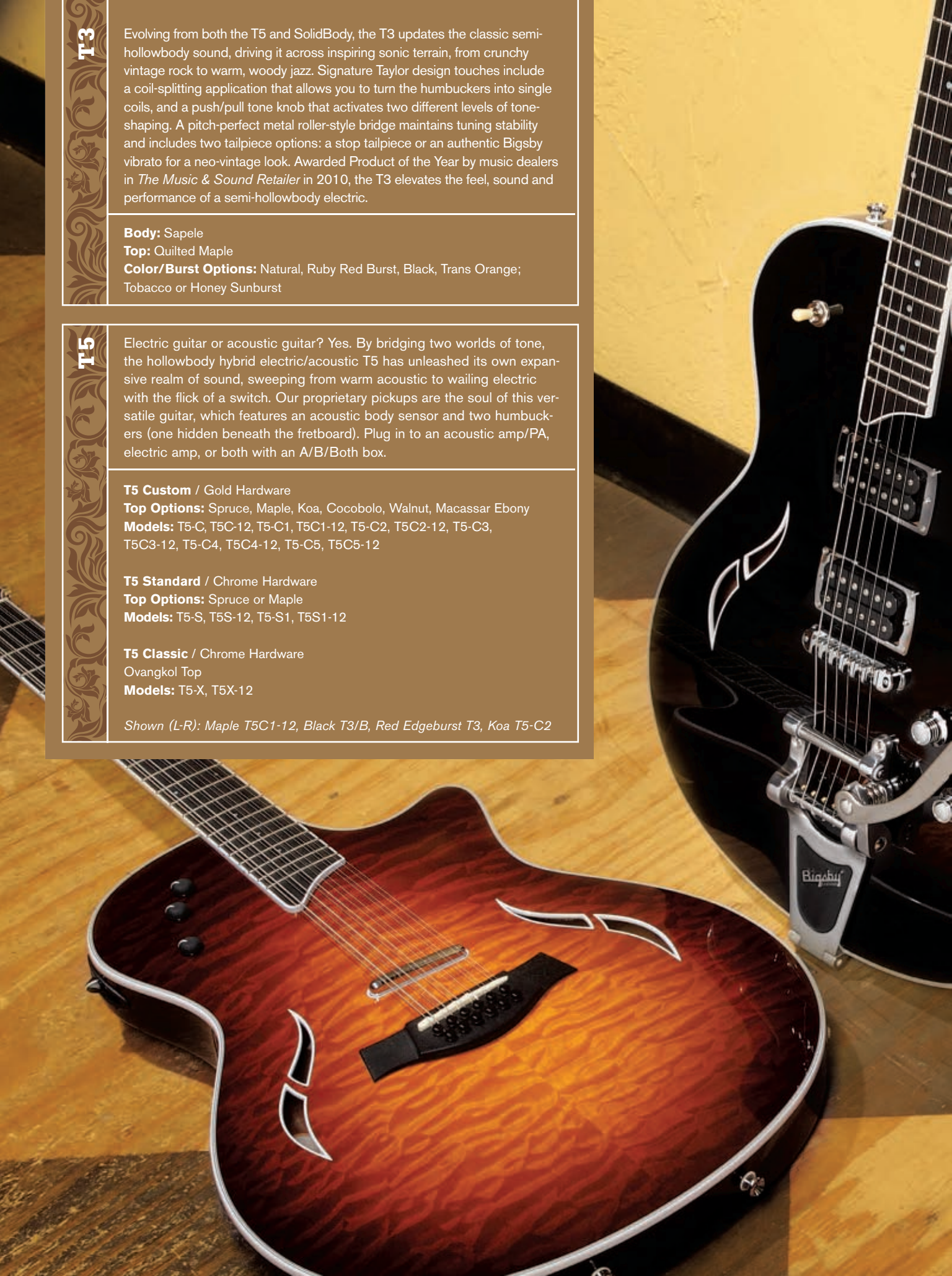
Electric guitar or acoustic guitar? Yes. By bridging two worlds of tone, the hollowbody hybrid electric/acoustic T5 has unleashed its own expansive realm of sound, sweeping from warm acoustic to wailing electric with the flick of a switch. Our proprietary pickups are the soul of this versatile guitar, which features an acoustic body sensor and two humbuckers (one hidden beneath the fretboard). Plug in to an acoustic amp/PA, electric amp, or both with an A/B/Both box.

T5 Custom / Gold Hardware
Top Options: Spruce, Maple, Koa, Cocobolo, Walnut, Macassar Ebony
Models: T5-C, T5C-12, T5-C1, T5C1-12, T5-C2, T5C2-12, T5-C3, T5C3-12, T5-C4, T5C4-12, T5-C5, T5C5-12

T5 Standard / Chrome Hardware
Top Options: Spruce or Maple
Models: T5-S, T5S-12, T5-S1, T5S1-12

T5 Classic / Chrome Hardware
Ovangkol Top
Models: T5-X, T5X-12

Shown (L-R): Maple T5C1-12, Black T3/B, Red Edgeburst T3, Koa T5-C2



PG NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

Sponsored by PRS Guitars

PEDAL ROUNDUP

We review the 37 hottest new guitar and bass pedals on the market.

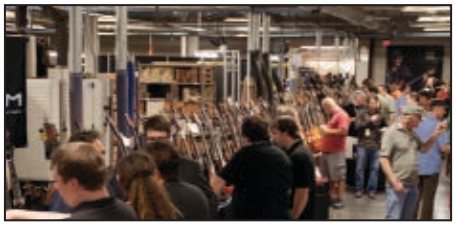
MASTODON

Brent Hinds and Bill Kelliher talk about recording *The Hunter*.

Photo by Andrew Stuart

THE GUITAR COLLECTION

Six axes from the amazing new Epic Ink book.



EXPERIENCE PRS 2011

We bring you the latest and greateset from the company's annual gala.

Photo by Jean-Claude Fourez

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DELAY PEDAL

Basic to brainiac—we show you how.

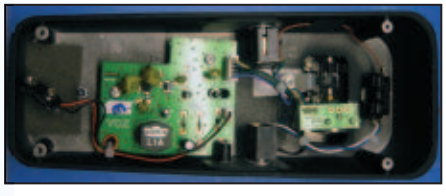
SAMANTHA FISH

The 22-year-old blues-rocker who's touring the world after playing for only seven years.

Photo by Danny Duarte

HISTORY OF THE TUBE SCREAMER

Behind guitardom's iconic overdrive.



4 PEDAL MODS FOR THE MASSES

Red Witch's Ben Fulton guides the way.

ST. VINCENT

Annie Clark talks about her pawnshop gems and art over athleticism.

FENDER VISITOR CENTER

Inside the incredible new facility.

BUILDER PROFILE: ROBERT KEELEY

One of the original pedal-mod gurus.

REVIEWS:

Orange Dark Terror • Framus Hollywood DC • Gibson USA Les Paul Junior DC Bass • Shadow NanoFlex-6 Acoustic Pickup

▶ **CLICK HERE** to see the **Taylor Guide** included in this issue.